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THE HERETIC OF SOANA

GERHART HAUPTMANN

Translated by
BAYARD QUINCY MORGAN



JOHN CALDER   LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

GERHART HAUPTMANN was born on the 15th November 1862 at Obersalzbrunn in Silesia where his father owned a small hotel Even as a child Gerhart showed signs of an exceptional personality being content with his own company and thoughts rather than participating with his brothers and other children in the normal pursuits of youngsters There was no school at the little spa and he was sent to a grammar school at Breslau where he was not a particularly brilliant scholar and he made no great success of orthodox education His father in the hopes of finding the right career for him placed him on the farm of an uncle to learn agriculture but after two years it was obvious that his exploring mind could not find satisfaction in farm work Gerhart returned to Breslau hoping to find more congenial study by attending an art school but again this was not a success From there he went to Jena for a year and became a student at the university He heard lectures in science history and philosophy from among others such well known philosophers as Haeckel and Eucken Following these studies, he travelled extensively through Switzerland Spain and Italy and eventually established himself as a sculptor in Rome A severe illness however forced him to give up this career and in 1884 he returned home to Germany After staying a few months in Dresden he finally

settled in Berlin in 1885 bringing with him his young wife the sister in law of one of his brothers

The period of irresolution and unsteadiness was now at an end Hauptmann met the members of the Freie Buhne an association of young writers and poets in Berlin and suddenly recognized his vocation to be a writer

He wrote his first drama in 1889 *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, a literary achievement of the highest significance in its pioneering movement toward realism its first performance caused a theatrical scandal but it was immediately acclaimed as a masterpiece and his name was made famous all over Germany In 1892 there followed *Die Weber* which was an even greater success and indeed was a milestone in German literary history Here for the first time the suffering masses act as the hero of a play The bourgeois audience was shocked

Hauptmann s fame is based on his dramatic work After *Die Weber* there followed *Kollege Crampton* (1892) *Der Biberpelz* (1893) *Florian Geyer* (1896) *Fuhrmann Henschel* (1898) *Michael Kramer* (1900) *Der rote Hahn* (1901) *Rose Bernd* (1903) *Elga* (1905) *Die Jungfern vom Bischofsberg* (1908) *Die Ratten* (1911) The dramas have not lost their appeal to present day audiences and are still produced not only in German theatres but on other European stages It was chiefly for these plays that Gerhart Hauptmann received the Nobel prize in 1912

Although Hauptmann is considered one of the greatest exponents of Naturalism in German literature choosing as his themes the joys sorrows and even the ugliness of everyday life among the common people many of his writings would classify him also as a

Romantic Among his early dramas were dream visions *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* (1895) fairy tales *Die versunkene Glocke* (1896) *Und Pippa tanzt* (1906) folk tales and sagas *Der arme Heinrich* (1902) and Griselda *Der weisse Heiland* and *Indipohdi* (1920)

In *Dorothea Angermann* (1926) and *Vor Sonnenuntergang* (1932) Hauptmann reverted to his theme of the sufferings of the lower classes As he grew older he became attracted to demonic subjects such as those he found in the old Greek sagas of the Atrides and he wrote *Iphigenie in Delphi Agamemnons Tod Elektra* and *Iphigenie in Aulis* (1941 3)

There is scarcely an artistic subject which he did not include in his writings and he used almost every literary form the drama the novel the novella the short story and poetry In the novella form *Der Ketzer von Soana* is a masterpiece of extraordinary beauty

Although his literary fame was universally acclaimed and his plays were included in the repertoires of all the more important theatres in Germany toward the end of his days Hauptmann himself lived a quiet and modest life in Agnetendorf a small town in the beautiful Riesengebirge in Silesia where he had settled in 1891 There he stayed with short interruptions until the end of his life The Hitler regime brought no difference to his way of life—as an old man he was fully immersed in his work Real tragedy came when in 1945 the Poles occupied his beloved homeland He witnessed millions of his fellow countrymen being driven away from their homesteads forced westwards as refugees he was one of the few allowed to stay on alone in Agnetendorf to await his death which occurred the following year (1946)

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF HAUPTMANN S LIFE

November 15th 1862 born at Obersalzbrunn S les a

1880–82 Attended the School of Art at Bre lau studying sculpture

1882 Became a student at Jena Univers ty

1883 Tra elled in Sw tze land Spain and Italy

1885 Married in Berl n

1885–89 Member of the Freie Buhne in Berlin

1889 Vo *Son enaufga g* Immediate success all over Germany

1890 *Das Fr densfest*

1891 Settled n Sile ia

189? *D e W eb* and *Kollege C ampt n*

1893 *De B be pel*

1894 *Ha nele*

1898 *F hrma n He schel*

1901 *D Rote H h*

1905 Made an honorary LL D of O ford Un err ty

1910 *Der Na r in Ch isto Emmanuel Qu nt*

1912 Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature

1918 *De K t e von Soa a*

8th June 1946 d ed in Agnetendorf Siles a and bu ied at Kloster on Hiddensee

THE HERETIC OF SOANA

Travellers can set out for the summit of Monte Generoso from Mendrisio or by the cog road from Capolago or from Melide via Soana where the road is most arduous The entire district belongs to Ticino a Swiss canton of Italian population

At a great height mountain climbers not infrequently came upon the figure of a bespectacled goatherd whose exterior was striking in still other respects The face indicated a man of education despite the tanned skin He looked not unlike the bronze statue of John the Baptist by Donatello in the cathedral at Siena His hair was dark and fell in curls over his brown shoulders His clothing consisted of goatskin

When a troop of strangers approached this man the guides commonly began to laugh Then when the tourists saw him they often burst out into unmannerly guffaws or made provocative remarks they felt justified by the strangeness of the sight. The herdsman paid no attention to them He did not even turn his head

All the guides really seemed to be on good terms with him Often they would clamber up to him and have long confidential talks with him When they returned and were asked by the tourists what sort of strange saint he was they would usually observe a

mysterious silence until he was out of ear shot But those travellers whose curiosity was still active would then find that this person had an obscure history and popularly designated as the heretic of Soana enjoyed a dubious esteem mingled with superstitious fear

When the writer of these pages was still young in years and often had the good fortune to spend glorious weeks in beautiful Soana it was inevitable that he should ascend Generoso now and then and that he too should catch a glimpse one day of the so called heretic of Soana He did not forget the man s appearance And after he had collected all sorts of contradictory information about him there ripened within him the resolve to see him again indeed to make him an actual visit

The writer was strengthened in his purpose by a German Swiss the physician of Soana who assured him that the eccentric fellow was not averse to receiving visits from educated persons He himself had once called on him I really ought to be angry with him said he because the fellow encroaches on my preserves But he lives so high up so far away and is only consulted thank heaven in secret by those few who would not object to being cured by the devil The physician continued You must know that the people believe he had sold himself to the devil a view which is not contested by the clergy because they originated it In the beginning they say the man fell a prey to an evil spell, until he himself became a confirmed villian and a hellish sorcerer As for me I did not notice that he had either talons or horns on him

Of his visits to this strange person the writer still has an exact recollection The manner of the first meeting was remarkable A special circumstance gave it the character of an accident For the visitor found himself by a steep wayside face to face with a helpless mother goat which had just dropped one kid and was about to give birth to a second The lonely creature in her distress looking fearlessly at him as if she had expected his help the deep mystery of any sort of birth there amid the tremendous rocky wilds made the profoundest impression upon him But he hastened his steps for he concluded that this animal must belong to the herd of the eccentric and wished to summon him to help He encountered him among his goats and cattle told him what he had observed and led him to the labouring mother behind which the second little kid damp and covered with blood was already lying in the grass

With the assurance of a physician with the tender love of the compassionate Samaritan, the animal was now cared for by its owner After he had waited a certain time he took one of the new born kids under each arm and set out slowly followed by the mother her heavy udder almost scraping the ground on the way to his dwelling The visitor was not only favoured with the friendliest thanks but invited in the most cordial manner to accompany the herdsman

The hermit had erected several buildings on the alp which he owned One of them resembled outwardly a rude heap of stones Inside it contained warm dry stabling The goat and her kids were stabled here while the visitor was conducted higher up the mountain to a

square white washed hut which leaning against the wall of Generoso stood on a vine covered terrace Not far from the little gate there shot out of the mountain a stream of water as thick as your arm filling an immense stone basin that had been hewn out of the rock Beside this basin an iron bound door opened into a mountain cave which soon turned out to be a vaulted cellar

One had from this spot which when viewed from the valley seemed to hang at an inaccessible height a glorious view of which however the author does not intend to speak On that occasion to be sure when he enjoyed it for the first time he passed from speechless astonishment into loud exclamations of rapture and back again into speechless astonishment His host however who just at this moment stepped out into the open again from the dwelling where he had been looking for something seemed all at once to be walking with quieter feet The way he acted indeed the entire calm tranquil bearing of his friendly host the visitor did not allow to escape him It served him as an admonition to be sparing of words chary of questions He was already too fond of the strange herdsman to run the risk of alienating him by even a hint of curiosity or obtrusiveness

The visitor of that day can still see standing on the terrace the round stone table with its circle of benches He sees it covered with all the good things which the heretic of Soana spread out upon it the most glorious *Stracchino di Lecco* delicious Italian wheat bread salami sausage olives figs and medlars and then a jug

of red wine which he had drawn fresh from the grotto When they sat down the long haired bearded host with his goatskin garments looked warmly into the visitor s eyes and at the same time clasped his right hand as if wishing to intimate an affection for him

Of all that was said at this first meeting the writer remembers only a little The mountain herdsman wished to be called Ludovico He related some things about Argentina Once when the tinkle of the angelus came up from far below he made a remark about this certainly provoking noise The name of Seneca was mentioned There was also some superficial talk about Swiss politics Finally the host wished to know a number of things about Germany, because it was the visitor s home When the visitor was ready to leave the hermit said You will always be welcome here

Although the writer of the e pages as he will not conceal was greedy for the history of this man even on his renewed visits he avoided betraying any interest in it People had communicated to him a few external facts in conversations which he had had in Soana facts which were said to be responsible for Ludovico s being described as the heretic of Soana but he took far more interest in finding out in what sense this designation was correct and in what peculiar inward vicissitudes what special philosophy the form of Ludovico s life had its roots Yet he reserved his questions and was richly rewarded for it

He usually found Ludovico alone either among the animals of his herds or in his cell A few times he came upon him as he like Crusoe was milking the goats with

his own hand or was putting the kids to a rebellious mother Then he seemed wholly absorbed in the herdsman s calling he rejoiced over the female that dragged her swelling udder on the ground over the male when he was in heat and mating Of one he would say Does he not look like the evil one himself? Just see his eyes What power what sparkling rage fury maliciousness And at the same time what sacred fire But to the author it seemed as if the eyes of the speaker held the same devilish flame as that which he had called a sacred fire His smile would take on a rigid and fierce character he would show his splendid white teeth and at the same time fall into a state of dreaming as he observed with the glance of the expert one of his demoniacal matadors at his useful labour

Sometimes the heretic played the pan pipe and the visitor would hear its simple scales as he drew near On such an occasion the conversation naturally turned to music and the herdsman unfolded strange views Never when he was among his flocks did Ludovico speak of anything but the animals and their habits of the herdsman s calling and its usages Not uncommonly would he pursue the psychology of the animals the mode of life of the herders back into the remotest past thus betraying a knowledge of no common scope He was speaking of Apollo telling how the latter tended the herds of Laomedon and Admetus and was a servant and herdsman I should like to know with what instrument he used to make music for his flocks And as if he were speaking of something real he finished By heaven I should have liked to listen to him Those were the moments when the shaggy recluse might per

haps cause one to suspect that his powers of under-standing were not quite undamaged. On the other hand the idea gained a certain justification when he proved in how many ways a flock may be managed and guided by music. With one note he chased them to their feet with others he calmed them down. With certain notes he brought them from afar with other he induced the animals to scatter or to trail along behind him close at his heels

There were also visits when almost nothing was sa Once when the oppressive heat of a June afternoon had ascended even to the pastures of Generoso Ludovico surrounded by his recumbent, cud-chewing flocks was found likewise outstretched in a state of blissful somnolence He only blinked at the visitor and motioned to him to stretch out in the grass likewise Then after this had been done and both had lain a while in silence he suddenly began in a trailing voice

You know that Eros is older than Cronus and mightier too —Do you feel this silent glow about us? Eros!—Do you hear how the cricket is chirping? Eros! —At this moment two lizards chasing each other darted like a flash across him as he lay there He repeated Eros Eros! —And as if he had given the command for it two strong bucks now arose and attacked each other with their curved horns He left them undisturbed although the combat grew more and more heated The clash of the blows rang louder and louder and their number kept increasing And again he said Eros Eros!

And now there came to the ears of the visitor for

the first time words that made him particularly atten tive because they shed or at least seemed to shed some light on the question why Ludovico was called the heretic by the people I had rather he said worship a live he goat or a live bull than a hanged man on a gallows I do not live in an age that does that I hate I abhor it Jupiter Ammon was represented with ram s horns Pan has the leg *of* a goat Bacchus the horns of a bull I mean the Bacchus Tauriformis or Tauricornis of the Romans Mithra the sun god is represented as a bull All peoples used to revere the bull *the* he goat the ram and to shed their sacred blood in sacrifice To that I say amen!—for the procreative power is the creative power procreation and creation are the same thing To be sure the cult of that power is no tepid whimpering of monks and nuns Once I dreamt of Sita the wife of Vishnu who assumed human form under the name of Rama The priests died in her embrace Then *for* a moment I had a glimpse of all sorts of mys teries Of the mystery of the black procreation in the green grass of the mother of pearl coloured lust of ecstacies and torpors of the secret of the yellow maize kernels of all fruits all swellings all colours of every kind I could have bellowed in a frenzy of pain when I caught sight of the pitiless all powerful Sita *I thought* I should die of desire

During this revelation the writer of these lines felt like an involuntary eavesdropper He arose with a few words that were meant to give the impression that he had not heard the monologue but had been pre occupied with other matters *He* started to leave Ludo vico would *not* permit it And so there began once more

on the mountain terrace an entertainment and what happened this time was significant and unforgettable

Directly upon his arrival the visitor was ushered into the dwelling the interior of the hut which has already been described It was square neat, had a fire place and resembled the simple study of a scholar It contained ink pen paper and a small library principally of Greek and Latin authors 'Why should I conceal from you said the herdsman that I am of good family and that I had a misguided youth and a good education. You will of course wish to know how I turned from an un natural person into a natural one from a captive into a freeman from a warped and morose man into a happy and contented one? Or how I shut myself out of society and Christianity? He laughed loudly Perhaps I shall write some day the story of my conversion The vis itor whose suspense had reached a climax once more found himself suddenly driven far from the goal Nor did he progress much when his host wound up by de claring that the cause of his re birth was this he wor shipped natural symbols

In the shade of the rock on the terrace by the brim of the overflowing basin in delicious coolness they had supped more richly than the first time smoked ham cheese and wheat bread figs fresh medlars and wine They had chatted about many things not boisterously but with quiet gaiety But now there came a moment which is as present to the writer as if it had just passed

The bronzed herdsman gave an impression of savagery with the long unkempt curls of his hair and beard and his goatskin clothing He has been compared to a John by Donatello And indeed his face and the features of

that John had much similarity in the fineness of the lines Ludovico was really handsome on closer inspection provided one could set aside the distorting eyeglasses On the other hand to be sure it was through them that the entire figure gained aside from a slightly comic effect its puzzlingly strange and arresting character At the moment of which we are speaking the entire person underwent an alteration Since the bronze like aspect of his body had also found expression in a certain immobility of the features it disappeared as they became animated and rejuvenated He smiled one might say in an access of boyish embarrassment

What I am going to ask you now said he I have not yet proposed to any man Where I have suddenly found the courage I really don t know myself From the old habit of past days I still read occasionally and still handle pen and ink too So I have written down in idle winter hours a plain story of events which are said to have taken place here in and about Soana long before my time You will find it extremely simple but it attracted me for all sorts of reasons which I will not discuss now Tell me briefly and frankly will you go into the house with me once more and do you feel inclined to lose some of your time in hearing this story which has cost me too many a profitless hour? I should rather dissuade than urge you d[illegible] if you say so

written in a monkish hand on strong paper As if to give himself courage he drank the visitor s health once more before pushing off from the shore as it were to plunge into the stream of the narrative and then began in a melodious voice

THE NARRATIVE OF THE MOUNTAIN HERDSMAN

On a mountain slope above the Lake of Lugano there is to be found among many others a little nest in the mountains which one can reach from the shore of the lake by a steep serpentine mountain road in about an hour The houses of the village which like those in most of the Italian places of that region consist of a jumbled grey ruin made of stone and mortar turn their fronts toward a gorge like valley which is formed by the meadows and terraces of the hamlet and on the other side by an immense slope of the over towering mountain giant, Monte Generoso

Into this valley and at the very spot where it really comes to an end as a narrow gorge a waterfall pours down from a valley that lies perhaps a hundred yards higher Its roar varying with the time of the day and the year and with the prevailing currents of the air whether strong or weak supplies the hamlet with continual music

Into this parish a long time ago there was transferred a priest of about five and twenty whose name was Raffælleo Francesco He had been born in Ligornetto hence in Ticino and could boast of being a member of the same family long resident there which had produced the greatest sculptor of united Italy—who was likewise born in Ligornetto and finally died there too

The young priest had spent his childhood with relatives in Milan and had been educated at various seminaries of Switzerland and Italy From his mother who was of noble stock he derived the serious trend of his character which impelled him at an early age and without any vacillation into the arms of a religious calling

Francesco who always wore glasses made himself conspicuous in the company of his fellow pupils by exemplary industry strict living and piety Even his mother was obliged to suggest to him delicately that as a future secular priest he might well indulge in a little pleasure and that he was not really bound by the strictest monastic rules As soon as he had been ordained however it was his sole desire to find a parish as remote as possible where as a sort of hermit he could consecrate himself unreservedly and more than even before to the service of God his Son, and the holy Mother

Now when he had come to the little hamlet of Soana, and had taken possession of the parsonage which was built on to the church the mountain-dwellers soon observed that he was of a totally different stamp from his predecessor even in appearance for the latter had been a massive bull like peasant who kept the pretty women and girls of the place under his control with the aid of wholly other means than ecclesiastical penances and penalties Francesco on the other hand was pale and delicate His eyes were deep-set Hectic spots glowed on the clouded skin over his cheekbones Then too there were his glasses, to this day in the eyes of simple folk a symbol of preceptorial severity and learn

ing At first the wives and daughters of the village had resisted him somewhat but after the lapse of four or five weeks he too had got them into his power after his own fashion and to a greater extent in fact than the other priest

As soon as Francesco stepped out into the street through the little door of the tiny parsonage nestling up against the church he would have children and women thronging about him kissing his hand with true veneration And the number of times in the day he was called to the confessional by the little bell on the church mounted up so by evening that his newly appointed housekeeper who was nearly seventy years old would exclaim that she had never known before how many angels were concealed in the otherwise rather corrupt village of Soana In short the name of the young pastor Francesco Vela spread far and wide through the countryside and he very soon came to be reputed a saint

Francesco did not allow himself to be disturbed by all this and was far from cultivating within himself any other consciousness than that he was tolerably fulfilling his duties He said his masses performed with unabated zeal all the churchly rites of divine service and—for the little school room was in the parsonage—attended besides to the duties of secular instruction

One evening at the beginning of March there was a very violent pull at the bell of the little parsonage and when the housekeeper came to open the door and threw the light of her lantern out into the dismal weather there stood before the door a somewhat un

couth fellow who wished to see the pastor After she had closed the door again the crone betook herself to her young master s room and announced not without noticeable anxiety that there was a visitor at this late hour But Francesco *who had made it one of his duties* to turn away nobody that needed him whoever it might be merely said shortly looking up from the pages of some church father Go Petronilla show him in

Soon afterward there stood before the pastor s table a man of about forty whose outward appearance was that of the peasants of that region only far more neglected indeed wholly uncared for He was bare foot Ragged rain soaked trousers were held up by a strap above the hips His shirt was open The brown hairy breast had for its continuation a shaggy throat and a face densely overgrown with black hair and whiskers in the midst of which flamed two darkly glowing eyes

The man had thrown shepherd fashion over his left shoulder a jacket consisting of patches and soaked with rain while he was excitedly turning around in his brown hard fists a little felt hat shrunken and dis coloured by the wind and weather of many years He had set down a long cudgel in front of the entrance

When asked what he wanted the man poured out with wild grimaces an incomprehensible flood of rude sounds and words which indeed belonged to the dialect of that region but to a special variety of it that seemed like a foreign tongue even to the housekeeper though the latter had been born in Soana

The young priest who had attentively observed his

visitor alongside the small lamp endeavoured in vain to fathom the sense of his request With much patience and by means of numerous questions he was finally able to get this much out of him that he was the father of seven children some of whom he would like to enroll in the young priest s school Francesco asked Where do you come from? And when the answer came abruptly I am from Soana the priest was astonished and said instantly That is not possible I know everybody in this place but I don t know you and your family

The herdsman farmer or whatever he was then gave a passionate description of the situation of his dwelling He accompanied this by many gestures, out of which however Francesco could make no sense He only said If you are an inhabitant of Soana and your children have reached the age fixed by law they would have had to be in my school long before this in any case And I must surely have seen you or your wife or your children in the church at mass or confession

Here the man opened his eyes wide and pressed his lips together Instead of any answer he expelled his breath as from an outraged and burdened breast

Well then I will write down your name I think it good of you to come yourself and take steps to see that your children may not remain ignorant and per haps godless At these words of the young priest the ragged visitor began to groan in a strange almost animal fashion so that his brown sinewy and almost athletic body was shaken by it

Yes indeed repeated Francesco taken aback I will write down your name and make inquiries into the

matter One could see tear after tear running from the reddened eyelids of the unknown over his unkempt face

Very well said Francesco who could not explain to himself the agitated conduct of his visitor and besides was rather disturbed than touched by it—very well your case will be investigated Just tell me your name my good man and send me your children tomorrow At these words the man was silent and looked for a long time at Francesco with a helpless and tortured expression The latter asked again What is your name? Tell me your name

The priest had been struck from the very beginning by some element of fear something hunted in the movements of his guest Now that he was to give his name and when at the same time the footstep of Petronilla was heard outside on the stone floor he ducked and revealed in other ways a terror such as is usually found only in lunatics or criminals He seemed persecuted He seemed to be fleeing from the police

Nevertheless he seized a piece of paper and the priest s pen, stepped into the darkness strangely enough away from the light and over to the window The sound from a nearby brook reached them and from a greater distance came the roar of the waterfall of Soana He traced with some difficulty but legibly something which he handed to the priest with an effort of the will The latter said All right, and making the sign of the cross Go in peace The uncouth fellow departed leaving behind him a cloud of vapours which were redolent of salami onions wood-smoke he goats and cow-stables. As soon as he was gone, Francesco threw the window open

The next morning Francesco had said mass as usual then rested a little then eaten his frugal breakfast and soon thereafter was on his way to see the Sindaco whom one must visit early in order to find him at home—for he rode daily from a railroad station far below on the lake shore into Lugano where he conducted on one of the busiest streets a wholesale and retail business in Ticino cheese

The sun was shining on the little square set with chestnut trees which were still bare The square lay close by the church and constituted a sort of agora for the village Upon some stone benches children were sitting and playing while the mothers and older daughters were gathered about an antique marble sarcophagus overflowing with a copious supply of cold mountain water They were washing clothes or carrying them away in baskets to dry The ground was wet, for rain mingled with snow flakes had fallen the day before and indeed it was under new fallen snow that the tremendous rocky slope of Monte Generoso with its inaccessible crags towered up beyond the gorge in its own shadow and wafted fresh snow laden air across to Soana

The young priest walked with downcast eyes past the washing women whose loud greeting he answered with a nod Looking over his glasses like an old man at the children who thronged about him he gave them his hand for a moment They all touched their lips to it eagerly and hastily The part of the village which lay behind the square was made accessible by a number of narrow lanes But even the main street could be used only by small vehicles and only the first stretch of that

Toward the end of the village it narrowed and more over became so steep that one could get through and up it at best only with a laden mule On this little street stood a small shop and the Swiss post-office

The post master who had been on terms of the greatest comradeship with Francesco s predecessor greeted him and was greeted in return but yet in such a way as to keep the full distance between the serious ness of the consecrated priest and the trivial friendliness of the layman. Not far from the post office the priest turned into a pitiful little side alley which descended in breakneck fashion by means of big and little flights of steps past open goat-stables and all sorts of dirty windowless cellar like cavities Chickens cackled cats perched on rotten galleries amid bunches of suspended ears of corn Here and there a goat bleated or a cow lowed having for some reason or other not been taken out to pasture

It was astonishing when you issued from these sur roundings and entering the house of the burgomaster through a narrow portal found yourself in a flight of small vaulted chambers the ceilings of which had been profusely painted by artisans with figures in the style of Tiepolo High windows and French doors adorned with long red curtains led from these sunny rooms out on to an equally sunny open terrace which was set off by wonderful laurel and cone-shaped box trees of great age Here too you heard the entrancing roar of the waterfall as you did everywhere and had the wild mountainside facing you across the valley

The Sindaco Sor Domenico was a well-dressed quiet man about in the mid forties who had married

for the second time scarcely three months before His beautiful blooming twenty two year old wife whom Francesco had encountered in the kitchen busy with the preparation of the breakfast led him in to see her husband When the latter had heard the priest tell of the visit which he had received the evening before and had read the slip which bore in awkward characters the name of the uncouth visitor a smile passed over his features Then he compelled the young priest to take a seat and began in a perfectly matter of fact way the mask like indifference of his features quite undisturbed throughout his speech to give the desired information about the mysterious visitor who actually was a citizen of Soana who had hitherto remained unknown to the pastor

Luchino Scarabota said the Sindaco—it was the name which the pastor s visitor had scribbled on the paper— is by no means a poor man but for years now his domestic affairs have been giving me and the entire parish the utmost concern and there is really no telling where the whole thing will ultimately end He belongs to an ancient family and it is very probable that he has in him some of the blood of the famous Luchino Scarabota da Milano who built during the fifteenth century the nave of the cathedral down in Como We have a number of famous old names in our small district Father as you know

While he spoke the Sindaco had opened the French doors and led the pastor out on to the terrace where he pointed out to him with a slightly raised hand in the steep funnel shaped watershed of the cataract one

of those huts hewn out of rough stone such as the peasants of the district inhabited But this farm lying at a great height far above all the others was distinguished from them not only by its isolated seemingly inaccessible situation but also by its smallness and shabbiness

Look where I am pointing my finger that is where this Scarabota lives said the Sindaco

I am surprised Father the speaker continued that you should not have heard anything as yet about that alp and its habitants Those people have been causing the most hateful scandal all over the countryside for a decade and more Unfortunately we can get no hold on them The woman has been brought into court and has claimed that the seven children she has borne—*could anything be more absurd?*—*are not those of the* man she lives with but of summer tourists from Switzerland, who have to go past that alp when they climb Monte Generoso And mind you the jade is covered with lice and dirt and is as repulsively ugly as sin

No it is common knowledge that the man who visited you yesterday and with whom she lives is the father of her children. But that is the point this man is at the same time her blood brother

The young priest turned pale

Of course this incestuous couple is avoided and outlawed by everybody In this respect the *vox populi* rarely errs With this explanation the Sindaco continued his account As often as one of the children has shown itself here say in Arogno or Melano it has been stoned nearly to death Wherever these people are known, any church which the notorious couple enters

is regarded as desecrated and the two outlaws were made to feel it in so terrible a way when they once thought they might make the attempt that for years they have lost all inclination to go to church And should it be permitted do you think that such children such accursed creatures who are a horror and a dread to every one, should come down here to our school and sit on the same bench with the children of good Christians? Can it be fairly asked of us that we should permit our entire village big and little to be tainted by these products of moral infamy these wicked mangy beasts?

The pale face of the priest Francesco betrayed by no change of expression what impression the narrative of Sor Domenico had made on him He thanked him and went away showing in his whole bearing the same dignified seriousness with which he had come

Soon after his conference with the Sindaco Francesco had made a report to his bishop on the Scarabota case A week later the answer of the bishop was in his hand commissioning the young priest to inform himself in person with regard to the general state of things on the so called alp of Santa Croce At the same time the bishop praised the spiritual zeal of the young man and confirmed him in the feeling that he had every reason to feel his conscience oppressed on account of these erring and outlawed souls and to be concerned for their salvation From the blessings and consolations of Mother Church one must exclude no sinner however far astray

Not till about the end of March did official duties

and also the condition of the snow on Monte Generoso permit the young priest of Soana with a farmer as guide to undertake the ascent to the alp of Santa Croce Easter was close at hand, and although along the steep side of the gigantic mountain avalanches were constantly rolling with hollow thunder down into the gorge below the waterfall yet wherever the sun had been able to work unchecked the spring had set in with full power

Unlike his namesake of Assisi Francesco was not a great lover of nature still all the tender sap laden things which were sprouting leafing and blooming about him could not but affect him Without the young man s needing to be clearly conscious of it he had the fine fermentation of spring in his blood and enjoyed his share of that inward swelling and urgency of all nature which is of heavenly origin and which, despite its rapturously sensuous earthly manifestations is heavenly too in all the joys that blossom out of it

On the square over which the priest first had to walk with his guide the chestnut trees had stretched out delicate green little hands from brown sticky buds The children were noisy and the sparrows no less so nesting under the church roof and in countless nooks and crannies of the many cornered village The first swallows were executing their broad loops from Soana across the abyss of the gorge where they seemed to swerve aside close to the fantastically turreted inacces sible rocky masses of the mountain wall High up on ledges and in holes of the rocks where no human foot had ever gone ospreys had their eyries The great brown couples undertook glorious cruises and floated

merely for the sake of floating for hours in endurance flights above the mountain peaks circling ever higher and higher as if they desired in self forgetting majesty to soar out into the untrammelled infinity of space

Everywhere not only in the air not only in the earth upturned and brown or robed with grass and narcissus not only in all that the earth sent upward through stems and trunks into leaves and blossoms but also in man there was a festal feeling and the brown faces of the farmers working on the terraces between the rows of vines with hoe or curved knife shone with the light of Sunday for most of them had already slaughtered the so called Easter lamb—that is a young kid—and hung it up on the door post at home with its legs tied together

The women grouped about the overflowing marble sarcophagus especially numerous and noisy today with their heaping wash baskets interrupted their clamorous merriment as the priest and his guide went by There were also washerwomen standing at the exit from the village where a stream of water gushed out of the rocks under a small image of the Virgin and flowed into a similar sarcophagus Both this and the one that stood on the square had been taken out of the ground some time before in an orchard full of thousand year holm oaks and chestnuts where they had stood since time immemorial barely emerging from the ground and hidden under ivy and wild laurel

In passing Francesco crossed himself—indeed he interrupted his walk for a moment—to render homage with a genuflexion to the Madonetta above the sar cophagus prettily surrounded with the wild flowers

brought by the peasants It was the first time he had seen this lovely little shrine with the bees humming about it for he had never yet visited this upper part of the village The lower part of Soana with its church and some pretty dwellings adorned with green shutters surrounding the chestnut tree square itself built up by masonry supported terraces was of almost middle-class prosperity and in it big and little gardens displayed blossoming almond and orange trees and tall cypresses —in short a more southern vegetation but up here a few hundred paces higher it was nothing but an impoverished alpine village of herders smelling of goats and cow stables Then too there began here an excessively steep mountain road paved with slabs of trap rock tramped smooth by the outgoing and incoming of the great communal flock of goats at morning and evening for it led up and out to the village common in the kettle shaped district that fed the brook Savaglia which forms farther down the glorious waterfall of Soana and after a short roaring passage through a deep gorge sinks into the Lake of Lugano

After the priest had climbed up a short time on this mountain road always under the guidance of his companion he stood still to take breath Taking his big black plate shaped hat from his head with his left hand he had drawn with his right a large gay coloured kerchief from his cassock with which he dabbed the beads of sweat from his forehead In general the love of nature in an Italian priest his feeling for the beauty of the landscape is not great But the distant view from a great height a so called bird s eye view does have a charm which seizes at times even the most unsophisti

cated and wrests from him a certain astonishment Far below him Francesco spied his church with its surrounding village at this height looking no bigger than a miniature while round about him the titanic mountain world seemed to tower higher and higher into the heavens With his spring time sensations was mingled now a consciousness of the sublime which may perhaps originate in a comparison of our own pettiness with the oppressively monstrous works of nature and their mute threatening nearness while this is combined with a partial realization of the fact that we too after all, have some sort of share in this almightiness In short Francesco felt sublimely great and infinitely small at one and the same instant, and this led him to make on forehead and breast with accustomed gesture the sign of the cross that shields from errors and demons

As he continued the ascent, religious problems and the practical ecclesiastical affairs of his parish had soon taken possession of the eager young cleric once more And as he again stood still and turned around this time at the entrance to a rocky mountain valley the sight of a sadly neglected stone work shrine erected here for the herders gave him the idea of going to see all the existing shrines of his parish however remote they might be and putting them into a condition worthy of their sacred purpose At once he began looking round him searching for a point of vantage that might command a view of all the existing shrines

He took his own church with its attached parsonage as his starting point As has been said before it stood on the level of the village square and its outer walls

were continued downward in the steep sides of its foundation rocks along the bottom of which a merry mountain brook tumbled cheerfully This brook flow ing through a channel underneath the Soana square came out into the light through a stone arch where it watered orchards and flowery meadows though to be sure seriously fouled by waste water Beyond the church and a little higher—though that was not ascer tainable from this point—stood on a round level terraced hill the oldest sanctuary in the neighbourhood a small chapel consecrated to the Virgin Mary whose duty image on the altar was over arched by a Byzantine mosaic in the apse This mosaic its gold ground and design well preserved despite its thousand and more years represented Christus Pantokrator The distance from the main church to this shrine was not more than thrice a stone s throw Another pretty chapel con secrated to St Anna stood at the same distance from it Over and behind Soana rose a sharply pointed mountain peak which of course was encircled by broad valley lands and the flanks of the overtowering chain of Monte Generoso This mountain almost like a sugar loaf in shape and seemingly inaccessible but green to the top was called St Agata because it housed on its peak a little chapel of that saint to be used in emer gencies This made in the immediate vicinity of the village one church and three chapels In addition there were three or four other chapels in the outskirts On every hill at every pretty turn of the road upon every peak with a view into the distance here and there by picturesque rocky precipices far and near over gorge and lake pious centuries had affixed houses

of God so that in this respect the deep and universal piety of heathendom which in the course of past millenniums had originally consecrated all these spots was still to be felt and thus created for itself divine allies against the threatening terrible powers of that savage nature

The young zealot looked with satisfaction upon all these institutions of Roman Catholic Christianity such as distinguish the entire canton of Ticino To be sure he also had to admit with the pain of the true champion of God that they did not always command an active living and pure faith nor even enough love and concern on the part of his associates to preserve all these scattered heavenly dwelling places from neglect and forgetfulness

After some time they turned off into the narrow foot path which leads in three hours of laborious ascent *to the summit of Generoso In doing so they very soon* had to cross the bed of the Savaglia on a tumble down bridge in whose immediate proximity was the reservoir of the little brook which plunged downward a hundred yards and more in the fissure made by its own erosion. Here Francesco heard from various heights depths and directions together with the rushing of the mountain waters hastening down to their reservoir the tinkle of the goat bells and saw a man of rude exterior—it was the communal herder of Soana—who stretched at full length on the ground supporting himself on the bank with his hands his head bent down to the water s level was quenching his thirst like an animal Behind him were grazing some she goats with their kids while a wolf hound was waiting with pricked up ears for

orders and the moment when his lord and master should be done with drinking I too m a herder thought Francesco The man rose from the ground he whistled shrilly through his fingers the sound re echoing from the rock walls and he threw stones off into the distance trying to frighten some of his widely scattered animals to drive others onward or to recall still others in order to save them from the danger of falling over the ledge Francesco thought what a laborious and responsible task this was even with animals to say nothing of men who were at all times exposed to the temptation of Satan

The priest now resumed the ascent with redoubled zeal as though there were danger that the Devil might perhaps be swifter than he on this road to his straying sheep He had been mounting laboriously for an hour or more ever higher and higher into the rocky wilds of Generoso guided all the while by his escort with whom Francesco did not deign to converse Suddenly he saw the alp of Santa Croce lying fifty paces before him

He would not believe that that heap of stones and the masonry in the midst of it built up without mortar out of flat stone slabs was the place which the guide had assured him he was seeking What he had expected after the words of the Sindaco was a certain pros perity whereas this dwelling could at most pass for a sort of shelter for sheep and goats in a sudden storm Since it stood on a steep slope composed of rocky debris and jagged boulders and since the zigzag course of the path to it was concealed the accursed spot

seemed to be without access The young priest fought down his astonishment and a certain feeling of horror he moved closer and now for the first time the sight of this avoided and outlawed abode took on a some what more pleasing aspect

Indeed the ruined pile became actually transformed before the eyes of the approaching priest into sheer loveliness for it seemed as if the avalanche of boulders and debris let loose at a great height were dammed and restrained by the rough hewn square dwelling so that beneath it there remained a stoneless slope of lush green on which yellow cowslips of the most delicate beauty climbed in delightful profusion up to the plat form in front of the house door—and as if they were inquisitive across the platform and literally through the house door into the outlawed cave itself

At this sight Francesco started This charge of yellow meadow flowers up against the ill reputed threshold this blooming ascent of luxuriant processions of long stemmed forget me nots under which veins of moun tain water seeped away and which likewise sought to take possession of the door with their blue reflection of the sky seemed to him almost an open protest against human bans excommunication and law courts In his astonishment which was followed by a certain con fusion Francesco had to seat himself in his black cassock on a sun warmed boulder He had spent his youth in the lowlands for the most part pent up in rooms church auditorium or study His feeling for nature had not been aroused He had never before carried out an expedition like this into the stern exalted loveliness of the high mountains and he would perhaps

never have done it if this combination of chance and duty had not urged the mountain trip upon him Now he was overwhelmed by the novelty and grandeur of his impressions

For the first time the young priest Francesco Vela felt a clear and transcendent sensation of existence surging through him making him completely forget at times that he was a priest and why he had come All his notions of piety which were intertwined with a quantity of church rules and dogmas had been not only displaced by this sensation but extinguished At this point he even forgot to cross himself Below him lay the beautiful Lugano district of the upper Italian Alps Sant Agata with its pilgrim haunted chapel over which the brown ospreys were still circling and the mountain of San Giorgio there rose up the peak of Monte San Salvatore and finally there lay below him so far below as to make one giddy carefully fitted into the valleys of the mountain relief like an elongated sheet of glass the arm of the Lake of Lugano known as Capolago on it the sailing boat of a fisher which looked like a tiny moth on a hand mirror Behind all this the white peaks of the High Alps had as it were climbed higher and higher with Francesco From among them rose the white Monte Rosa with seven white peaks before it glistening against the silky blue of the azure like a diadem and a mirage

If one may justly speak of a mountain sickness so one may speak with no less justification of a condition which befalls men on mountain heights and which one may best designate as incomparable health This health the young priest now experienced in his own blood

like a rejuvenation Beside him between stones and among the still barren heather stood a little flower the like of which Francesco had never seen in his life It was an excessively lovely species of blue gentian, whose petals were painted with a surprisingly delicious flaming blue The young man in the black cassock left the floweret which he had started to pluck in the first joy of his discovery standing unmolested in its modest place and merely pushed the heather plants aside in order to study the miracle long and with rapture Everywhere there pushed up between the stones young light green leaves of the dwarf beech and from a certain distance across the slopes of hard grey rubble and tender green the flocks of the wretched Luchino Scarabota announced themselves by their tinkling bells This entire mountain world had a primitive strangeness the youthful charm of bygone human ages of which there was no longer any trace left in the low valleys

Francesco had sent his guide home as he wished to make the return trip undisturbed by the presence of any one and moreover could not desire any witness of what he was planning to do at the hearth of Luchino In the meantime he had already been observed and a number of dirty childrens heads with matted hair were thrust out again and again in curiosity from the smoke blackened hole that served as door to Scarabota s stone citadel

Slowly the priest began to approach it and entered the circle of buildings Here he could see the great extent of the owner s live stock the ground was littered by the droppings of a great herd of cattle and goats Into Francesco s nose penetrated more and more

strongly together with the powerful rarefied moun tain air the smell of those animals whose increasing pungency was rendered tolerable at the entrance to the dwelling by the charcoal smoke that forced its way out at the same time When he appeared in the frame of the door cutting off the light with his black cassock the children retreated into the darkness where they met with silence the greeting and all the other saluta tions of the priest who did not see them Only an old she goat came up bleated softly and sniffed at him

Gradually to the eye of God s messenger it had become lighter in the interior of the space He saw a stable filled with a high pile of manure and deepening at the rear into a natural cavern which had been originally present in the gompholite or whatever rock it was In a rude stone partition at the right a passage had been opened through which the priest cast a glance at the now forsaken family hearth a mountain of ashes the centre still full of coals and heaped up on the rock floor which lay exposed in its natural state On a chain thickly coated with soot an equally sooty bossed copper kettle hung above the hearth By this fireplace of stone age man stood a backless bench whose broad seat as thick as your fist rested on two equally broad posts fastened in the rock and which for a century and more had been smoothed and polished by generations of tired herdsmen and their wives and children The wood no longer seemed to be wood but rather a polished yellow marble or soap stone though with countless scars and cuts The foursquare room which by the way with its naturally untrimmed walls built up of rough boulders and slabs of slate looked

more like a cave and from which the smoke passed through the door into the stable and from there into the open because it had no other outlet unless perhaps through some leaks in the walls—this room was blackened by the smoke and soot of decades so that one might almost fancy oneself in the interior of a chimney thickly coated with soot

Francesco was just noting the peculiar gleam of eyes that were shining from out of a corner when a rolling and sliding of rubble became audible outside and immediately afterward the form of Luchino Scarabota stepped like a noiseless shadow into the doorway It shut out the sun so that the room was still more heavily darkened The uncouth mountain herder was breathing heavily not only because he had traversed in a short time the distance from a remote more elevated alp after he had observed from there the priest s arrival but because this visit was an event for the outlawed man

The greeting was short Francesco was compelled by his host to sit down after the latter had with his rough hands cleared the soap stone bench of the stones and cowslips which served his accursed brood as playthings

The mountain herder stirred the fire and blew upon it with puffed cheeks whereat his feverish eyes gleamed still more wildly in the reflected light He nursed the flame with logs and dry brushwood so that the pungent smoke was enough to drive out the priest The herdsman was obsequious and submissive he acted with a nervous eagerness much as if everything now depended on not losing by some wrong move the favour of the higher being that had entered his poor dwelling He brought out a great pail full of milk

which was covered with a thick layer of cream but was unfortunately fouled in such an incredible fashion that for that reason alone Francesco was unable to touch it Although he had become hungry he also declined to partake of fresh cheese and clean bread because he had a superstitious fear of committing a sin by eating it Finally when the mountaineer had some what composed himself and was standing facing him with fearful expectant eyes and limp arms the priest began to speak as follows

Luchino Scarabota you are not to be deprived of the consolation of our holy church and your children shall hereafter not be cast out of the community of Catholic Christians if it turns out on the one hand that the evil rumours touching you are untrue or if you honestly confess show penitence and contrition and are pre pared with God s aid to remove the stumbling block Therefore first open your heart to me Scarabota confess freely in what respect you are calumniated and confess with honest truth the thing that is burdening you

After this speech the herdsman was silent Only a brief wild sound was suddenly wrung from his throat It betrayed no feeling however but had rather a gurg ling bird like quality With the fluency of familiarity Francesco at once proceeded to hold up before the sinner the terrible consequences of obduracy and the propitiatory goodness and love of God the Father which he had proved through the sacrifice of his only Son the sacrifice of the Lamb which took the sins of the world upon itself Through Jesus Christ he con cluded any sin can be forgiven provided that an

unreserved confession combined with remorse and prayer has proven to our Heavenly Father the contrition of the miserable sinner

The priest had waited a long time and was rising with a shrug of the shoulders as though he intended to leave then finally the herder began to choke out an incomprehensible tangle of words a sort of gurgling like that of a disgorging hawk And with straining attention the priest attempted to seize upon as much as was comprehensible in the chaos But what he could understand seemed to him quite as strange and remarkable as what was obscure Only this much became clear from the alarming and oppressive quantity of imaginary things—that Luchino Scarabota wished to secure his aid against all kinds of devils that lived in the mountains and harassed him

It would ill have become the credulous young priest to doubt the existence and activity of evil spirits Was not creation filled with all manner and degree of fallen angels from the train of Lucifer the rebel whom God had cast out? Yet here he felt horrified not knowing whether it was at the mental darkness he was encountering caused by unheard of superstition or whether it was at the hopeless blindness caused by ignorance He resolved to ask some questions in order to form a judgment as to his parishioner s range of ideas and the power of his understanding

Then it soon became evident that this wild neglected man knew nothing of God still less of Jesus Christ the Saviour and least of all about the existence of a Holy Ghost On the other hand it began to seem as if he felt himself surrounded by demons and was possessed by

a gloomy persecution mania And in the priest he did not see the chosen servant of God at all but rather a mighty sorcerer or God himself What could Francesco do but cross himself while the herder humbly threw himself on the ground and with moist protuberant lips began to lick his shoes like an idolater and to cover them with kisses

The young priest had never found himself in such a situation The rarefied mountain air the spring the separation from the usual level of civilization all this had the effect of befogging his consciousness Something like a visionary spell entered the sphere of his soul where reality was dissolving into unstable airy forms This alteration was combined with a faint fearfulness which suggested to him more than once a precipitate flight down into the realm of consecrated churches and chimes The Devil was powerful who could know how many ways and means he had of luring onward the most unsuspecting most faithful Christian and hurling him down from the brink of a giddy height into the abyss

Francesco had not been taught that the idols of the heathen were nothing but empty creations of the imagination The Church expressly recognized their power only that it represented it as one hostile to God They were still fighting with almighty God though hopelessly for the world Hence the pale young priest was not a little startled when his host fetched a wooden article out of some nook in his dwelling a horrible carving which was no doubt a fetish Despite his priestly horror of the lascivious object Francesco could not refrain from taking a closer look at it With abhorrence

and astonishment he confessed to himself that the most revolting heathenish abominations namely the rural worship of Priapus were still active here Nothing but Priapus it was clearly evident could be represented by this primitive religious emblem

Scarcely had Francesco seized the harmless little god of procreation the god of rural fertility who was so openly accorded high honour by the ancients when the strange constriction of his soul turned into holy wrath Without stopping to think he flung the obscene little alruna into the fire from which the herder rushing forward as swiftly as a dog drew it out again in the same instant It was glowing in spots and in other spots it was flaming but the rough hands of the pagan immediately restored it to safety But now along with its deliverer it had to undergo a torrent of castigating words

Luchino Scarabota did not seem to know which of the two gods he should regard as the stronger the wooden one or the one of flesh and blood However he kept his eyes in which horror and terror were mingled with spiteful rage fixed on the new deity whose atrocious daring did not at any rate point to any sense of weakness Once started the emissary of the one and only God did not allow himself to be intimidated in his sacred zeal by the glances threatening as they were of the benighted idolator And without any ceremony he now came to speak of the heinous sin from which as every one said the numerous progeny of the mountaineer had sprung

Amid the young priest s loud words burst as it were the sister of Scarabota but without saying anything

and merely eyeing the zealot in secret, she busied her self here and there in the cavern She was a pale and repulsive woman to whom washing seemed to be a thing unknown One had disagreeable glimpses of her naked body through the rents of her neglected clothing

After the priest had finished and had temporarily exhausted his store of stinging reproaches the woman sent her brother out into the open with a short barely audible word Without objection the savage dis appeared like the most obedient hound Then the filth encrusted sinner whose matted black hair hung down over her broad hips kissed the priest s hand with the words Praised be Jesus Christ!

Then she instantly burst into tears

She said the priest was quite right to condemn her with harsh words She had indeed sinned against the word of God though not at all in the way indicated by the calumnies told about her She alone was the sinner her brother however was wholly innocent She swore and by all the saints that she had never been guilty of that frightful sin of which she was accused—incest To be sure she had lived unchastely and as she was now confessing she was ready to describe the fathers of her children if not to call them all by name For she knew very few of the names since need had often caused her to sell her favours she said to passing strangers

For the rest she had brought her children into the world painfully and without any help and some she had had to bury shortly after their birth here and there in the debris of Monte Generoso Whether he could give

her absolution or not she knew nevertheless that God had forgiven her for she had done penance enough through privations sufferings and cares

Francesco could not but regard the tearful confession of the woman as a tissue of lies at least so far as the incest was concerned To be sure he felt that there were actions which it is absolutely repugnant to confess before men and which God alone learns in the solitary stillness of prayer He respected this reserve in the de generate woman and could not conceal from himself that in many respects she was of a higher type than her brother In the manner of her justification there was a great resoluteness Her eye confessed but neither kind urgency nor the glowing pincers of the executioner would have wrested from her a confession in words It was she as it turned out that had sent the man to Francesco She had seen the pale young priest when she went to market one day at Lugano where she sold the products of her mountain farm and at sight of him she had taken courage and had conceived the idea of recommending her outlawed childen to his mercy She alone was the head of the family and cared for her brother and her children

I will not dicuss said Francesco how far you are guilty or innocent One thing is certain if you do not wish your children to grow up like beasts you must separate from your brother As long as you live with him the frightful reputation you have can never be lived down People will always assume that you have committed that terrible sin

After these words obstinacy and defiance seemed to become dominant in the woman at any rate she made

no answer for a long time as if no stranger were present devoted herself to her household duties Mean while a girl of about fifteen came in drove some goats into the opening of the stable and then began to help the woman also as if Francesco were not there The young priest knew at once as soon as he merely saw the girl s shadow gliding through the depths of the cave that she must be of uncommon beauty He crossed himself for he felt in his body a faint dread of an in explicable kind He did not know whether he should resume his admonitions in the presence of the youthful shepherdess To be sure there could be no doubt that she was depraved to the core since Satan had called her to life by the way of the blackest sin but still there might be a remnant of purity left in her and who could know whether she had any idea of her black origin

Her movements at any rate displayed great calm ness from which one could certainly not conclude that she had an uneasy mind or a load on her conscience On the contrary everything about her was of a modest self assurance which was not affected by the presence of the pastor She had so far not cast a glance at Francesco at least not so that he had met her eye or otherwise caught her looking at him Indeed while he himself was secretly watching her through his glasses he had to cast more and more doubt on the supposition that a child of sin a child of such parents could really be so formed At last she vanished up a ladder into a sort of attic so that Francesco could now continue his laborious pastoral work

I cannot leave my brother said the woman and for the very simple reason that he is helpless without me

He can write his name after a fashion and I taught him that only with the greatest difficulty He does not know coins and he is afraid of the railroad the city and people If I go away he will pursue me as a wretched dog pursues his lost master He will either find me or perish miserably and then what is to become of the children and our property If I stay here with the children, then I d like to see the man who could succeed in getting my brother away unless they should put him in chains and lock him up in Milan behind iron bars

The priest said That may yet come to pass if you will not take my good advice

Then the woman s fears turned into rage She had sent her brother to Francesco so that he might take pity on them but not to have him make them unhappy In that case she would certainly rather go on living as hitherto hated and cast out by the people down below She was a good Catholic, but if the church cast out a man he had a right to sell himself to the Devil And what she had not yet done the great sin with which she was charged she might then actually commit

Simultaneously with these smothered words of the woman interspersed with sudden outcries Francesco kept hearing from above where the girl had disappeared a sweet singing now like the softest breath, now increasing in power so that his soul was more under the spell of this melody than intent upon the furious outbursts of the woman And a hot wave rose up in him combined with an anxiety such as he had never felt before The smoky hole of this animal human

dwelling stable seemed to be transformed as by enchantment into the loveliest of all the crystalline grottoes of Dante s Paradise—full of angel voices and the flutter of pinions that sounded like those of the laughing dove

He went It was impossible for him to withstand any longer without trembling visibly such confusing influences Outside emerging in front of the excavated stone pile he inhaled the freshness of the mountain air and was immediately filled like an empty vessel with the titanic impression of the mountain world His soul became transferred as it were into the farthest ranges of his eyesight and consisted of the colossal masses of the earth s crust from distant snowy peaks to nearby terrible abysses under the royal brightness of the spring day Still he saw the brown ospreys describing their unconscious circles above the sugar loaf of Sant Agata Then he hit upon the idea of holding a secret service for the outlawed family up there and laid this plan before the woman who had stepped dejectedly upon the threshold of the cave about which dandelions were clustering To Soana you cannot venture as you well know said he and if I should invite you there it would be a great mistake for both of us

Again the woman was moved to tears and promised to appear before the chapel of Sant Agata on a certain day with her brother and the older children

When the young priest had gone far enough away from the vicinity of the dwelling place of Luchino Scarabota and his curse laden family so that he could not longer be seen from there he chose a sun warmed boulder to rest on while he thought over what he had

just experienced He told himself that he had ascended there with a thrill of interest, to be sure but yet with a dutifully sober mind and without any foretaste of that which was now disquieting him in such an ominous manner What was it? He smoothed brushed and picked at his cassock for a long time as if this would enable him to extract the secret

When some time had elapsed and he had still not yet felt the desired enlightenment he took his breviary from his pocket, as was his wont but even though he at once began to read aloud it did not free him from a certain strange irresoluteness He felt as if he had forgotten to do something some important part of his mission Hence from behind his glasses he turned his eyes again and again toward the road with a certain expectancy and could not summon up courage to con tinue the descent he had begun

So he fell into a strange reverie from which he was wakened by two small incidents which to his over wrought imagination took on an exaggerated impor tance First his right hand lens cracked under the influence of the cold mountain air and almost immediately afterward he heard a fearful sneeze above his head and felt a heavy pressure on his shoulders

The young priest sprang up He laughed loudly when he recognized as the cause of his panic a spotted he goat which had given him a proof of its unlimited confidence by resting its fore hooves on his shoulders without any regard for his clerical garb

But this was only the beginning of its most obtrusive familiarity The shaggy buck with his strong finely curved horns and his flashing eyes was accustomed it

seemed to beg of passing mountain climbers and did this in such a droll resolute and irresistible fashion that one could only get rid of him by running away Again and again rearing in the air he set his hooves on Francesco s breast and seemed determined after the harassed priest had perforce submitted to having his pockets sniffed at and after some bread crumbs had been consumed with ravenous greed to nibble at the priest s hair nose and fingers

An old bearded she goat with bell and udder touching the ground had followed the highwayman and encouraged by him began to harass the priest likewise Upon her the breviary with its gilt edges and cross had made a particular impression and she succeeded while Francesco was occupied with repelling a curving buck s horn in getting possession of the little book and taking its black printed leaves for green ones she followed the prescription of the prophet and feasted literally and greedily upon the sacred verities

The annoyances were increased by the arrival of other animals which had been scattered about grazing then of a sudden the shepherdess appeared as his rescuer It was the very same girl that Francesco had first casually beheld in Luchino s hut After she had driven off the goats the strong slender girl stood before him with freshly reddened cheeks and laughing eyes he said You have saved me my good child And he added with a laugh of his own as he received his breviary from the hands of young Eve It is really queer that despite my pastoral office I am so helpless against your flock

A priest may not converse with a young girl or

woman longer than his ecclesiastical duty may demand and the parish remarks on it at once if he is seen in such a tete a tete outside the church So mindful of his stern calling Francesco continued his journey homeward without tarrying long and yet he had the feeling that he had detected himself in a sin and must purify himself at the next opportunity by a remorseful penance He had not yet got beyond the reach of the herd bells when the sound of a woman s voice came to his ears suddenly making him forget once more all his meditations The voice was of such a nature that he did not surmise that it might belong to the shepherdess he had just left behind France co had not only heard in Rome the church choir in the Vatican but had also often heard secular singers in Milan with his mother years before and so the coloratura and the *bel canto* of prima donnas were not unknown to him Involuntarily he stood still and waited It is undoubtedly tourists from Milan he thought and hoped perhaps in passing to get a glimpse of the possessor of this glorious voice As she did not seem to come he again carefully descended footstep by footstep down from the giddy height into the valley below

What Francesco had experienced on this official errand as a whole and in detail was not worth talking about if one does not take into consideration the abominations that had their breeding place in the hut of the miserable Scarabotas But the young priest felt at once that this mountain trip had become an event of great significance in his life even though he was for the moment far from realizing the entire scope of that significance He could trace a transformation that

working from within him had taken place in his being He found himself in a new state which seemed stranger to him every minute and somewhat suspicious but yet nowhere nearly so suspicious that he would have scented Satan as being behind it or perhaps have *thrown an ink pot at him even if he had had one in his* pocket The mountain world lay below him like a paradise For the very first time with involuntarily folded hands he congratulated himself on having been entrusted by his superiors with the administration of just this parish Compared with this delicious height and depth what was Peter s vessel which came down *from Heaven with three angels holding the corners?* Where was there a greater majesty from man s point of view than these inaccessible crags of Monte Generoso on which ever and again the dull springtime thunder of melting snow was audible in an avalanche?

From the day of his visit to the outlaws Francesco to his own astonishment could no longer find the way back to the thoughtless peace of his former existence The new aspect which nature had assumed for him did not fade away again and she would not permit herself to be driven back in any way into her former inanimate state The manner of her influences by which the priest was oppressed not only by day but also in his dreams he called and recognized at first as temptations And as the faith of the church had been fused with pagan superstition just by the fact of having struggled against it, hence Francesco attributed his transformation in all seriousness to the touching of that wooden object that little alruna which the shaggy herdsman had rescued

from the fire Undoubtedly there had still remained active a remnant of those abominations which the ancients reverenced under the name of phallic worship that shameful cult which had been laid low in the world by the holy war of the cross of Jesus Up to the time when he had set eyes on the disgusting object the cross alone had been burned into Francesco s soul They had branded him just exactly as they brand the sheep of a flock with a red hot die with the stigma of the cross and this stigma had become present alike in waking and in dreaming the symbol of his own essence Now the accursed and embodied Devil was looking down over the cross-piece of the cross and that most unclean horrible satyr-symbol was usurping more and more in constant conflict the place of the cross

Francesco had reported to his bishop as well as to the burgomaster on the success of his pastoral visit, and the answer which he received from him was an approval of his procedure Above all wrote the bishop let us avoid any open scandal He found it extremely shrewd that Francesco had appointed a special and secret service for the poor sinners on Sant Agata in the chapel of the Holy Mother Mary But the approval of his superior could not restore the peace of Francesco s soul he could not get rid of the idea that he had come back from up there with a kind of enchantment fastened upon him

In Ligornetto where Francesco was born and where his uncle the famous sculptor had spent the last ten years of his life there still lived the same old pastor who had initiated him as a boy into the saving truths of the Catholic faith and had pointed out to him the paths of

grace This old priest he sought out one day after he had walked the road from Soana to Ligornetto in about three hours The old priest bade him welcome and was visibly touched as he consented to hear the confession which the young man wished to make to him Of course he absolved him

Francesco s pangs of conscience are substantially expressed in the revelation which he made to the old man He said Since I was in the home of the wretched sinners on the alp of Soana I find myself under a kind of obsession I shudder I feel as if I had not only put on another coat but actually another skin When I hear the waterfall of Soana roaring then I should like best to climb down into the deep gorge and place myself under the falling masses of water for hours at a time so as to become pure and healthy as it were inside and out When I see the cross in the church the cross over my bed I laugh I cannot weep as I used to when picturing to myself the sufferings of the Saviour On the other hand my eyes are attracted by all sorts of objects which are like the alruna of Luchino Scarabota Sometimes they are quite unlike it too and I see a resemblance just the same In order to study in order to bury myself deeply in the study of the Church Fathers I had curtains put up before the windows of my little room Now I have taken them away The singing of the birds the roaring of the many brooks through the meadows past my house after the melting of the snow yes even the scent of the narcissus used to disturb me Now I open my double windows wide in order to enjoy all this with veritable greediness

All this alarms me Francesco had continued but

there is worse yet As if by black magic I have got into the power of unclean devils Their tickling and prickling their impudent prodding and provocation to sin at every hour of the day and night is terrible I open the window and through their sorcery it seems to me as if the songs of the birds in the blossoming cherry tree under my window were teeming with unchastity Certain shapes in the bark of trees and even certain lines of the mountains remind me of parts of the *corpus femininum* It is a terrible assault of crafty spiteful and odious demons to which I am delivered up in spite of all my prayers and castigations All nature —I tell you with horror—sometimes roars bellows and thunders in my frightened ears one monstrous phallic song whereby as I am forced to believe despite all my reluctance it worships the miserable little wooden idol of the herder

All this of course increases my unrest and torture of conscience Francesco had proceeded the more so that I recognize it as my duty to march to battle as fighter against that pestilential herd up there on the alp But that is still not the worst part of my confession Worse still even in the duties most inseparable from my calling there is mingled with an almost devilish sweetness something like an all perplexing inextinguishable poison Once I was moved with pure and holy zeal by the words of Jesus where he tells of the lost sheep and the shepherd who forsakes his flock in order to bring it back from the inaccessible cliffs But now I doubt whether this zeal of mine is as pure as I once thought it I awake at night my face bathed in tears and everything within me is dissolved into sobbing compassion

for the lost souls up yonder But when I say lost souls this is perhaps the point where a sharp line must be drawn between the false and the true for the sinful souls of Scarabota and his sister are represented in my mind s eyes simply and solely by the fruit of their sin that is their daughter

Now I ask myself whether unlawful desire for her is not the cause of my eagerness and whether I am doing aright and not running the risk of eternal death if I continue my apparently pious work

Serious but smiling at times the old experienced priest had listened to the pedantic confession of the youth This was the Francesco he knew with his con scientious love of outward and inward order and his craving for scrupulous accuracy and neatness He said Francesco be not afraid Keep to the path you have always trodden It must not surprise you if the machina tions of the evil enemy appear to be most powerful and dangerous just at the time when you are proceeding to rob him of the victims that he already thought were safe so to speak

In a mood of relief Francesco stepped out of the parsonage into the street of the village of Ligornetto in which he had spent his early youth It is a little place situated on a rather flat and broad valley floor and sur rounded by fruitful fields upon which over the heads of vegetables and grain stalks the grape vines are entwined back and forth from mulberry to mulberry like firmly twisted dark ropes This locality is also dominated by the mighty crags of Monte Generoso the west side of which here rises majestically from its base

It was about midday and Ligornetto was drowsy Francesco was barely greeted on his way by a few cackling chickens some playing children and at the end of the village by a yelping dog Here that is at the end of the village the residence of his uncle closed the street like a door It had been erected by a man of considerable means and was once the *Buen Retiro of* Vincenzo the sculptor It was now uninhabited and had come into the possession of the canton of Ticino as a sort of memorial endowment Francesco walked up the steps of the forsaken garden where he yielded to a sudden desire to revisit for once the interior of the house Neighbouring farmers old acquaintances handed the key over to him

The connections which the young priest had with the fine arts were the traditional ones of his rank His famous uncle had been dead for about ten years and since the day of his burial Francesco had not been inside the celebrated artist s home He could not have said what suddenly moved him to visit the empty house which he had hitherto mostly regarded only in passing and with fleeting interest His uncle had never been more to him than a dignitary whose sphere of activity was an alien meaningless thing

When Francesco had turned the key in the lock and had stepped into the vestibule through the door that creaked on its rusty hinges a faint shudder passed through him at the dust laden stillness which was wafted toward him down the stairs and from all sides out of the open doors Just to the right of the hall was the late artist s library which revealed at once that an eager student had lived here In low book-cases there

were shelved here not only Vasari but the entire works of Winckelmann while the Italian Parnassus was re presented by the sonnets of Michelangelo and by Dante Petrarch Tasso Ariosto and others In specially constructed cabinets a collection of drawings and etch ings was housed also one of Renaissance medallions and all sorts of valuable curios among them painted Etruscan vases and some other examples of ancient art in bronze and marble were set up in the room Here and there on the wall hung in a frame a particularly fine drawing by Michelangelo or Leonardo represent ing perhaps a male or female nude One small cabinet had three of its sides filled almost from top to bottom with such objects

From here one entered a domed rotunda whose elevation traversed several stories and which got its light from above Here Vincenzo had worked with modelling wood and chisel and the plaster casts of his best works filled this almost churchly room a crowded and mute assemblage

Oppressed even alarmed and starting at the echo of his own footsteps with a bad conscience as it were Francesco had got this far and now proceeded really for the first time to study this or that work of his uncle s There was Ghiberti to be seen beside a statue of Michelangelo A Dante was there too These works were covered with systems of dots as the models had been executed on a larger scale in marble But these world famed figures could not hold the attention of the young priest for long Near them were the statues of three young girls the daughters of a marquis who had been sufficiently open minded to let the master

portray them in the nude From all appearances the youngest of the young ladies was not over twelve the second not over fifteen the third not over seventeen years old Francesco only came to himself after he had surveyed the slender bodies for a long time in utter self forgetfulness These works did not display their nudity like those of the Greeks as a natural nobility and image of the deity but one felt it as an indescretion of the bedroom In the first place the copy of the originals had not been disassociated from them as per sons and had remained fully recognizable as such and these originals seemed to say we have been indecently exposed and disrobed by brutal decree contrary to our will and our sense of shame When Francesco awoke from his absorption his heart was pounding and he looked fearfully in all directions He was doing nothing wrong but he felt it was a sin even to be alone with such creations

He resolved to depart as quickly as possible lest he should be actually caught there Yet when he had again reached the house door he dropped the latch into the lock from the inside instead of going away and turned the key so that he was now locked into the ghostly house of the dead man and could no longer be surprised by anybody This done he resumed his station before that scandal in plaster the three graces

His heart began to beat more violently and a pale and fearful madness came over him He felt impelled to stroke the hair of the oldest marchioness as if she were living Although this action plainly and in his own judgment bordered on insanity yet it was still a priestly one to a certain extent But the second mar

chioness had to suffer more a stroking of shoulder and arm—a round shoulder and a round arm which ended in a soft and delicate hand Soon Francesco by more extended caressing of the third and youngest marchioness and finally by a shy sinful kiss under her left breast had become a disconcerted perplexed and penitent sinner who was in no better frame of mind than Adam when he heard the voice of the Lord after he had eaten of the apple of knowledge He fled He ran away as if haunted

The following days Francesco spent partly in the church praying partly in his parsonage chastising himself His penitence and his remorse were deep By a fervor of worship such as he had not known hitherto he might hope to be victor in the end over the temptations of the flesh Yet the struggle between the good and evil principle had burst out in his breast with undreamed of frightfulness so that it seemed to him that God and the devil had for the first time transferred their battleground to his breast Even the strictly irresponsible part of his existence sleep no longer offered the young cleric any peace for just that unguarded season of human repose seemed especially favourable to Satan for setting up seductive and pernicious delusions in the innocent soul of the young man One night toward morning he knew not whether it happened while sleeping or waking he saw in the white light of the moon the three white figures of the lovely daughters of the marquis enter his room and approach his bed and on looking closer he perceived that each one coalesced in magic fashion with the image of the young shepherdess on the alp of Santa Croce

There was no doubt that from the little toy dwelling of Scarabota down into the room of the priest, into which the alp could look through the window a con nection had been established whose hemp was not spun by angels Francesco knew enough of the heavenly hierarchy as of the hellish one to recognize at once whence this work took its origin. Experienced in many a branch of scholastic science he assumed that evil demons in order to exert certain pernicious effects, make use of the influence of the stars He had learned that with respect to his body man belonged among the celestial spheres, that his reason made him the equal of the angels that his will was subordinated to God but that God permitted fallen angels to direct his will away from God and that the realm of the demons was in creased by alliance with such already perverted beings Moreover a temporary physical emotion, when ex ploited by the hellish spirits could often be the cause of a man s eternal damnation In short, the young priest quivered to the marrow of his bones in fear of the poisonous sting of the *diaboli* the demons that reek of blood of the bestial Behemoth and most especially of Asmodeus the well known demon of whoring

He could not at first decide to presuppose in the accursed incestuous couple the sin of witchcraft and sorcery To be sure he had one experience which seemed to him gravely suspicious Every day he under took with holy zeal and all the resources of religion a purification of his soul in order to cleanse it of the image of the shepherd-girl and again and again she stood there more clearly firmly and plainly than before What sort of a painting was it, and what sort

of an indestructible panel of wood underneath it, or what sort of a canvas on which one could not make the slightest impression either by water or fire?

The continual intrusion of this image became the object of his quiet and astounded observation He would read a book and when he saw on a page the soft countenance framed in its peculiarly reddish earth brown hair and gazing with wide dark eyes he would cover it with a leaf previously inserted But it passed through every leaf as if none were there just as it made its way through curtains doors and walls both in the house and in the church

Amid such anxieties and inward dissensions the young priest almost died of impatience for the appointed date of the special service on the peak of Sant Agata would not come quickly enough He wished to do the duty he had undertaken as quickly as possible because he might perhaps in that way wrest the girl from the talons of the prince of hell He wished still more to see the girl again but what he desired most was his liberation which he confidently expected from his torturing enchantment Francesco ate little spent the greater part of his nights in wakefulness and becoming daily more haggard and pale was more than ever invested by his parish with the odour of an exemplary piety

The morning had come at last on which the pastor had his appointment with the poor sinners in the chapel that stood high up on the sugar loaf of Sant Agata The extremely arduous path to the chapel could not be traversed in less than two hours At the ninth hour Francesco stepped out into the square of Soana ready for the trip with his heart cheered and refreshed and

surveying the world with new born eyes It was nearing the first of May Nothing more delicious could be imagined than this day which was just beginning but the young man had often lived through days of equal beauty before this without feeling as he did today as if Nature were the very garden of Eden Today he was in the midst of Paradise

Women and girls were standing as usual about the sarcophagus with its flow of clear mountain water and saluted the priest with loud cries Something in his bearing and his mien as well as the holiday freshness of the young day had given the laundresses courage With skirts wedged between their legs so that in some cases the brown calves and knees were visible they stood bending over working stoutly with their equally brown powerful bare arms Francesco stepped up to the group He felt induced to say all kinds of friendly things that in no case bore any relation to his pastoral office and that dealt with good weather good spirits and the hope of a good wine-crop For the first time probably stimulated by his visit to the house of his uncle the sculptor the young priest condescended to inspect the ornamental frieze on the sarcophagus which consisted of a bacchanalian procession and showed prancing satyrs dancing female flutists and the tiger drawn chariot of Dionysus the grape crowned god of wine At this moment it did not seem strange to him that the ancients had covered the stone vestment of death with the figures of effervescing life The women and girls among whom there were some of unusual beauty chattered and laughed into the sarcophagus during this inspection and at times it seemed to him

that he himself was surrounded by shouting intoxicated mænads

This second ascent into the mountain world compared with the first one was like that of a man with open eyes compared to that of one who had been blind from the womb Francesco felt with compelling clearness that he had suddenly had his eyes opened In this respect the inspection of the sarcophagus seemed to him not an accident at all but deeply significant Where was the dead man? Living water of life filled the open stone and coffin and the eternal resurrection was portrayed in the language of the ancients on the surface of the marble Thus was the Gospel to be understood

To be sure this was a gospel which had little in common with that which he had previously learned and taught It derived by no means from the leaves and letters of a book but rather came welling up through grass plants and flowers from out of the earth or floating down with the light from the centre of the sun All nature seemed to be animated and eloquent Formerly dead and mute she became active confiding frank and communicative Suddenly she seemed to be telling the young priest everything that she had hitherto concealed He seemed to be her favourite her chosen one her son whom she was initiating like a mother into the holy secrets of her love and motherhood All the abysses of terror all the anxieties of his startled soul were no more Nothing remained of all the thick darknesses all the fears of the supposed assaults of hell All nature radiated goodness and love and Francesco overflowing with goodness and love was able to requite her with goodness and love

Strange as he laboriously clambered upwards through broom dwarf beech and blackberry vines often slipping on sharp-edged stones the spring morning invested him like a symphony of nature as mighty as it was blissful which spoke more of creating than of the creation Frankly was revealed the mystery of a creative labour that was for ever exempt from death Whoso did not hear that symphony so it seemed to the priest deceived himself when he presumed to join the Psalmist in his songs of praise jubilate Deo omnis terra or benedicte cœli domino

In sated abundance the waterfall of Soana roared down into its narrow gorge Its roar sounded full and gluttonous Its speech could not be ignored Striking one s ear now more muffled now more clearly in eternal variation over the land floated the voice of satiety Avalanche thunder broke loose from the gigantic shaded steep of Generoso and by the time it had become audible to Francesco the avalanche itself with noiseless streams of rolling snow had already poured itself down into the bed of the Savaglia Where was there anything in nature which was not caught in the transformation of life and was without a soul any thing in which an urgent will was not exerted? The Word Scripture song and impelling heart s blood were everywhere Did not the sun lay a delicious warm hand on his back between the shoulders? Did not the leaves of the laurel and beech thickets swish and sway when he brushed them in passing? Did not the water well up everywhere and describe everywhere babbling softly the lines and loops of its flowing script? Did not he Francesco Vela and did not the fibrous roots

of myriads of growths large and small read it and was it not its secret which was revealed in myriads of blossoms and flower chalices? The priest s hands lifted a tiny stone and found it covered with reddish strands here too a speaking colouring writing wonder world a creative form which bore witness to the universal force revealed in the plastic creation—the plastic force of life

And did not the voice of the birds bear the same witness *uniting like a network of infinitely delicate* invisible threads above the hollows of the titanic rock valley? This audible network seemed to Francesco at times to turn into visible threads of a silvery brilliance set gleaming by an inward and eloquent fire Was it not the love and revealed happiness of nature made concretely audible and visible? And was it not delicious to note how this woof as often as it was blown or rent asunder was ever again reunited as with hastily flying indefatigable shuttles? Where were the little feathered weavers perching? One did not see them save perhaps when some little bird silently and swiftly changed its place the tiniest throats poured out this super-exultant far flung eloquence

Where everything was swelling everything throbbing within him as well as round about him Francesco did not know how to ascertain the place of death He touched the trunk of a chestnut tree and felt how it was driving the nutritive juices up through itself He drank in the air as if it were a living soul and knew at the same time that it was this to which he owed the breathing and the thanksgiving of his own soul And was it not this alone which made of his throat and

tongue a speaking organ of the revelation? Francesco paused a moment before a swarming busily active ant hill A tiny dormouse had been devoured by the mysterious little creatures almost down to its graceful skeleton Did not the pretty little skeleton, and the dormouse submerged and vanished in the warmth of the ant-colony speak of the indestructibleness of life and had not nature in her creative urge or compulsion merely sought a new form? Once more the priest saw this time not below but far above him the brown *ospreys of Sant Agata Their winged and feathered* bodies bore through space in majestic rapture the miracle of the blood the miracle of the beating heart But who could fail to see that the changing curves of their flight described on the blue silk of the heavens a clear and unmistakable script whose meaning and beauty had the closest connection with life and love? Francesco felt exactly as if the birds were inviting him to read And if they wrote with the course of their flights then the power to read was not denied them either Francesco thought of the far reaching sight that is bestowed upon these winged fishers and he thought of the countless eyes of men birds mammals insects and fish with which nature beholds herself With ever deeper astonishment he recognized the eternal mother liness in her She made provision that nothing in the province of the all mother should remain unenjoyed or hidden to her children they had been endowed by her not only with the senses of the eye the ear of smell taste and touch but Francesco felt that she had prepared for the transformations of the æons countless additional senses What a mighty seeing hearing smell

ing tasting and feeling was going on in the world!—And a whitish cloud hung above the ospreys It was like a radiant pleasure tent But this too as one looked at it lost its place and was altered in the liveliest mutation.

They were deep and mystic forces that had pierced the cataract on the eyes of the priest Francesco But as a foil to this experience was the unspeakably blissful circumstance that he saw four delicious hours before him which were to include a fresh meeting with the poor outlawed shepherd girl This consciousness made him confident and rich as if time so delightfully spent could never pass Up yonder yes up yonder where the little chapel stood above which the ospreys circled there was awaiting him a happiness he thought which the angels might envy him He climbed and climbed and the blissfullest zeal winged his steps What he was planning to do up yonder must surely cause a sort of transfiguration to descend upon him and make him in detached proximity to Heaven almost the equal of the good eternal Shepherd himself Sursum corda! Sursum corda! He kept uttering the Franciscan greeting to himself while by his side walked St Agata the martyr to whom the little chapel on the peak had been dedicated and who had gone to her death by the hangman's hand as to a merry dance And behind her and him so it seemed to Francesco in his eager ascent followed a train of holy women all of whom were going to witness the miracle of love on the festive summit Mary herself walked with deliciously flowing ambrosial hair and lovely feet far before the priest and his procession of sainted women so that under her glance under her

breath under her feet the earth might be covered for all of them with festal flowers Invoco te! invoco te! breathed Francesco to himself in ecstasy invoco te nostra benigna stella!

Unwearied the priest had arrived at the summit of the conical mountain which was scarcely broader than the tiny house of God that stood there It also supplied space for a narrow ledge and a cramped little fore court the middle of which was occupied by a young and still leafless chestnut tree A fragment of the sky or of Mary s blue robe seemed to be strewn about the little chapel in the wilds so widely had the blue gen tians spread about the sanctuary Or one might also have imagined that the tip of the mountain had simply been immersed in the azure of the sky

The choir boy and the two Scarabotas were already there and had made themselves comfortable under the chestnut tree Francesco grew pale for his eyes had searched in vain though but hastily for the young shepherdess But he put on a stern countenance and opened the door of the chapel with a large rusty key without giving any sign of the disappointment and the dismay and struggle in his soul He entered the diminu tive church whereupon the choir boy made certain preparations behind the altar for the celebration of the mass From a bottle he had brought some holy water was poured into the dried up font into which the two Scarabotas were now to dip their hardened sinful fingers They sprinkled and crossed themselves and dropped on their knees in timid awe close by the threshold

Meanwhile Francesco driven by agitation betook himself once more into the open where with a sudden profound and silent emotion after walking about a little he found the girl he sought somewhat below the topmost platform resting upon a starry sky of brilliant blue gentians Come in I am waiting for you called the priest She rose with seeming indolence and glanced at him quietly from under lowered lashes At the same time she seemed to be smiling with a lovely gentleness that was caused as a matter of fact merely by the natural formation of her sweet mouth the charming light of her blue eyes and the delicate dimples of the rounded cheeks

At this moment was consummated the fateful renewal and perfection of the picture that Francesco had cherished in his soul He saw a childlike innocent Madonna face whose distracting charm was combined with a very slight but painful bitterness The striking redness of the cheeks rested upon a white skin not a brown one from which the moist crimson of the lips shone out with the glow of a pomegranate Every strain in the music of this childlike countenance was at once sweet and bitter melancholy and gay In her glance was a shy retreat and at the same time a tender challenge unconscious flower like innocent of the violence of animal passions If the eyes seemed to hold within them the riddle and the fairy tale of the flower the whole appearance of the girl resembled rather a beautiful ripe fruit This face as Francesco s inward eyes saw with astonishment still belonged to an utter child as far as the soul found expression in it only a certain swelling roundness like that of the grape, suggested

that she had overstepped the boundary of childhood and attained to the destiny of the woman Her hair partly earth coloured partly crossed by lighter strands was wound into a heavy coil about temples and brow Some trace of a ripe heavy inwardly fermenting slumbrousness seemed to pull the girl s lashes downward and gave to her eyes a certain moist, over urgent tenderness But the music of her countenance changed below her ivory neck into a different one whose eternal notes express a different meaning With her shoulders the woman in her began a woman of a youthful yet mature stature that almost inclined to overweight and did not seem to belong to the childlike head The naked feet and strong tanned legs supported a fruitful plumpness that the priest thought was almost too heavy for them The head possessed unconsciously or at most faintly divined the sensuously ardent mystery of its Iris like body But for that very reason Francesco realized that he was irretrievably and forever at the mercy of that head and that irresistible body

But whatever the youth perceived realized and felt in the moment when he looked once more upon this creature of God so heavily burdened with a heritage of sin one could detect nothing of it in his looks His lips merely quivered a little What is your name? he asked simply In a voice that seemed to Francesco like the cooing of a heavenly laughing dove the sheperdess said that she was called Agata Can you read and write? he asked She answered No Do you know anything about the meaning of the holy office of the Mass? She looked at him and made no reply Then he bade her enter the little church and betook himself into it ahead

of her Behind the altar the choir boy helped him into his vestments Francesco placed the cap on his head and the holy service was ready to begin never had the young man felt himself so full of a solemn fervour as on this occasion

It seemed to him that the all bountiful God had only just appointed him to be his servant The road of priestly consecration which he had trodden seemed to him no longer dry empty, illusory as if it had nothing in common with the truly divine The divine hour the holy season had begun within himself The love of the Saviour was like a heavenly rain of fire in which he was standing and through which all the love of his own spirit was suddenly liberated and kindled to flame With infinite tenderness his heart expanded over the entire creation and was united with all other creatures in the same rapturous pulse beat From this intoxication which almost stupified him burst forth in redoubled power his feeling of compassion for all created things his zeal for the divinely good and it seemed to him that for the first time he had a full understanding of the holy Mother Church and her service At this moment he wished to become her servant with a renewed and wholly different zeal

And how the journey the ascent to this summit had revealed to him the mystery in regard to whose significance he had questioned Agata! Her silence before which he had himself grown mute meant to him although he had not betrayed it that she shared his knowledge through the revelation that had now been experienced by them both Was not the eternal mother the epitome of all transmutation and had he not lured

to this superterrestrial summit these neglected darkness encompassed groping lost children of God in order to display to them the miracle of the Transubstantiation of the Son the eternal flesh and blood of the Godhead? Thus the young man stood and lifted the cup with streaming eyes full of joy It seemed to him as if he himself were becoming God In this newly experienced state of being a Chosen Vessel a holy instrument he felt himself growing with invisible organs into all the heavens with a sense of bliss and supreme power that made him feel as if exalted to an infinite height above the swarming spawn of the churches and their priestlings They would see him they would lift their eyes to him in astounded reverence as he stood on the dizzy summit of his altar For he was standing before the altar in quite another and higher sense than that in which the holder of Peter s keys the Pope does so after his election In convulsive ecstasy he held the cup of the Eucharist and the Transubstantiation—as a symbol of the eternally new self birth of the entire creation in the body of Christ—out into the infinity of space where it shone like a second and brighter sun And while he stood there with the elevated sacrament an eternity in his estimation in reality two or three seconds it seemed to him as if the sugar loaf of Sant Agata were covered from top to bottom with listening angels saints and apostles But almost more glorious seemed to him a hollow drum beat and a line of beautifully dressed women who linked together with garlands of flowers and clearly visible through the walls danced around the little chapel Behind them whirled in ecstatic frenzy

the mænads of the sarcophagus while the goat footed satyrs danced and pranced some of them bearing in merry procession Luchino Scarabota s wooden symbol of fruitfulness

The descent to Soana brought to Francesco as to one who has drunk the final dregs from the cup of intoxica tion a meditative disenchantment The Scarabota family had gone away after the mass brother sister and daughter had gratefully kissed the young priest s hand at parting

As he descended farther and farther into the depths he grew more and more suspicious of the state of mind in which he had celebrated the mass up yonder The peak of Sant Agata had surely been in former times a place of pagan worship and what had taken hold of him up there apparently with the rushing sound of the Holy Ghost was perhaps the demoniacal work of that dethroned theocracy which Jesus Christ had deposed but whose pernicious power was still tolerated by the creator and ruler of the world Arriving at Soana and his parsonage the priest had been wholly possessed by the consciousness of having committed a grievous sin and his anxieties on this account became so severe that even before his noon meal he entered the church which stood wall to wall with his dwelling in order to commit himself in ardent prayers to the highest Mediator and perhaps be cleansed by His grace

In a feeling of pure helplessness he begged God not to deliver him over to the assaults of the demons He felt very clearly he confessed how they were attack ing his soul in all manner of ways now shutting it up now causing it to expand beyond its previous whole

some limits transforming it in the most terrible fashion

I was a little garden carefully tilled to Thy praise Francesco said to God Now it is drowned in a flood which is rising and rising perhaps through planetary influences and on whose shoreless waters I float help lessly in a tiny skiff Formerly I knew my path exactly It was the one which Thy holy church prescribes for her servants Now I feel rather driven than certain of my goal and my path Give me pleaded Francesco my former restrictions and my assurance and command the evil angels to cease from directing their dangerous assaults against Thy helpless servant Lead O lead us not into temptation It was in Thy service that I ascended to those poor sinners cause me to find my way back into the strictly limited sphere of my holy duties

Francesco s prayers had no longer their pristine clearness and conciseness He prayed for things which were mutually exclusive At times he himself fell into doubt as to whether the stream of passion which carried his prayers came from heaven or from some other source That is to say he did not exactly know whether he was not actually beseeching heaven for some boon from hell The fact that he included the two Scarabotas in his prayer might have its source in Christian com passion and pastoral care but was it the same thing when with a fervour that brought him to scalding tears he prayed for the deliverance of Agata?

To this question he could for the present give an affirmative answer for the clear stirring of his most powerful instinct which he had felt on seeing the girl

again had passed over into a dreamy enthusiasm for something infinitely pure This transformation was the reason why Francesco did not perceive that that fruit *of a mortal sin was coming to take the place of Mary* the Mother of God and was for his prayers and thoughts one might say the incarnation of the Madonna On the first of May there began in the church of Soana as everywhere a special worship of Mary the observance of which put to sleep still more effectually the watchfulness of the young priest Regularly every day at about the hour of twilight he delivered a little discourse principally to the women and daughters of Soana which had for its subject the virtues of the Blessed Virgin Before and afterward the nave of the church resounded with songs of praise in honour of Mary which rang out through the open door into the springtime And with the delicious old airs so beautiful in both text and music there mingled from without the cheerful chirping of sparrows and the sweet plaint of the nightingales in the damp gorges of the neighbourhood At such moments Francesco while apparently serving Mary was wholly given over to the service of his idol

Had the mothers and daughters of Soana dreamed that in the eyes of the priest they formed a congregation which he was inviting to the church day after day to the glorification of that hated child of sin or in order to have himself wafted on the devout strains of the songs in honour of Mary to the tiny pasture clinging far and high upon the crags he would surely have been stoned As it was it seemed as if the young pastor s piety increased every day before the wondering eyes of

the entire parish Little by little old and young rich and poor in short everybody from Sindaco to beggar from the most faithful to the most indifferent church goer was drawn into the May madness of Francesco Vela

Even the long solitary walks which he now took were construed in the young saint s favour And yet they were only undertaken in the hope that on such an occasion chance might lead Agata across his path For fearing to betray himself he had arranged that the next special service for the Scarabota family was to take place only after an interval of more than a week which now seemed to him unendurable

Nature was still speaking to him in that open manner of which he had first become aware on the road to Sant Agata on the height of the little sanctuary Every grass blade every flower every tree every vine and ivy leaf was a word in a speech that issued from the primeval source of all being and that even in the deepest silence spoke with a Titan s voice Never had any music so permeated his entire being and as he thought filled it with the Holy Ghost

Francesco had sacrificed the deep peaceful sleep of his nights The mystic awakening which had befallen him seemed to have slain death so to speak and to have banished its brother sleep Every one of these nights of creation throbbing with the pulse of the life that welled up everywhere became for Francesco s young body a *time of sacred revelation* so that it sometimes seemed to him indeed as if he felt the last veil fall from the mystery of the Godhead Often when he passed

from heated dreams which were almost a waking state into the wakefulness of his senses when out yonder the waterfall of Soana roared twice as loudly as by day, when the moon was contending with the darkness of the mighty ravines and black cloud banks were darkening in gigantic surliness the highest peaks of Generoso Francesco s body trembled with prayers fervent as never before and somewhat as when a thirsty tree whose tops are being watered by the spring rain quivers in the wind In this state he would wrestle with God full of longing to be initiated into the sacred miracle of creation as into the flaming core of life into that holiest innermost Something that issues from thence and permeates all living things He would say From thence O Thou my almighty God radiates Thy brightest light from this flaming core that streams out in ever inexhaustible waves of fire is diffused all the rapture of existence and the secret of the intensest pleasure Lay not a completed creation into my lap O God but make me a co-creator with Thee Let me participate in Thy never interrupted work of creation for only thus and not otherwise can I also become a participant in Thy paradise Unclothed Francesco would walk about in his room with the window wide open in order to cool the heat of his limbs and let the night air surge about his body And then it would seem to him as if the black thunder-storm were riding upon the gigantic rock ridge of Generoso as a monstrous bull rides upon a heifer snorting rain from its nostrils bellowing shooting quivering flashes from darkly flaming eyes and performing with heaving flanks the procreative labour of fecundity

Ideas like these were altogether pagan and the priest knew it without being as yet disquieted by it He had already become too deeply immersed in the universal lethargy of the surging forces of spring The narcotic breath which filled his being detached the limits of his confined personality and gave him the expansion of the universe Everywhere gods were being born in the dead morning of nature and the depths of Francesco s soul opened likewise and sent up images of things which lay buried in the abyss of millions of years

One night while in a half waking state he had an oppressive and in its way frightful dream which plunged him into a dreadful devotion He became as it were the witness of a mystery which breathed a terrible strangeness and at the same time something like the consecration of a primitive irresistible power Hidden somewhere in the rocks of Monte Generoso there seemed to be monasteries from which dangerous ladders and little stairways led down the rocks into inaccessible caverns Down these ladders were climbing in solemn train one after the other bearded young and aged men in brown cowls who by the absorbed character of their movements as also by the remote expression of their faces made one shudder and seemed to be condemned to the performance of a terrible wor ship These wild and almost gigantic figures were venerable in an alarming way They came down erect and tall with vast unkempt bushy heads on which no line divided hair from beard And these celebrants of a pitiless and bestial worship were followed by women who were only clothed as in heavy golden or raven mantles in the mighty billows of their hair Whereas

the yoke of that passion kept the silently descending dream anchorites under its spell in rigid insensibility there rested upon the women a humility as upon sacrificial animals that are offering themselves to some terrible deity In the eyes of the monks there was a silent insensible frenzy as if the poisonous sting of some rabid beast had wounded them and infused a mad ness into their blood a furious outburst of which was to be expected Upon the foreheads of the women in their devoutly piously lowered lashes there was an exalted solemnity

At last the anchorites of Generoso placed themselves singly like living idols in shallow niches of the rock wall and there began a phallic worship as ugly as it was sublime Horrible as it was—and Francesco shuddered to the depths of his soul—it was equally thrilling in its deadly seriousness and its fearful sanctity Huge owls ranged with piercing shrieks along the rock walls amid the plunging of the waterfall and in the magic light of the moon but the deafening cries of the great night birds were outdone by the heart paralyzing anguished shrieks of the preis esses as they died of the tortures of ecstasy

The day of the divine service for the poor outlawed mountain herders had finally come round again Even in the morning when Francesco got up it resembled no other among all those he had ever experienced Thus in the life of every privileged man days spring up unexpected and unbidden like a blinding revelation On this morning the young man had no desire to be either a saint or an archangel or even a god Nay he

was rather seized with a faint fear that saints arch angels and gods might be made his foes by envy for on this morning he felt himself exalted above the saints angels and gods But on the summit of Sant Agata a disappointment was awaiting him His idol who bore the name of the saint had absented herself from the churchgoing Questioned by the blanching priest the rude animal father only produced rude animal sounds whereas his wife who was at the same time his sister excused her daughter on grounds of household work Thereupon the holy office was performed by Fran cesco in so listless a manner that at the end of the mass he did not rightly know whether it had already begun Inwardly he experienced the torments of hell indeed such states of mind as in comparison with a real fall from heaven to hell made of him a poor damned soul

After he had dismissed at once both the ministrants and the two Scarabotas he descended at random one side of the steep peak still utterly disconcerted with out being conscious of any goal still less of any danger Again he heard the nuptial cries of the circling ospreys but they sounded to him lil e mockery poured out upon him from the deceptively gleaming ether In the rubble of a dry water course he slipped panting and leaping while he whimpered confused prayers and curses He felt torments of jealousy Although nothing had hap pened save that the sinner Agata had been detained by something or other on the alp of Soana it seemed a settled thing to the priest that she had a lover and was spending the time stolen from church in his villainous arms While her absence brought home to his con sciousness all of a sudden the immensity of his depen

dence he felt by turns fear consternation and rage the impulse to punish her and to beg her for deliverance from his distress—that is for the return of his love He had by no means put off the pride—the wildest and most unyeilding of all—of the priest, and this pride had been injured to the utmost For him the default of Agata was a threefold humiliation The sinner had spurned the man as such the servant of God and the giver of the sacrament The man the priest, and the saint writhed in convulsions of down trodden vanity and foamed at the mouth when he thought of the bestial fellow herdsman or woodchopper whom in the meantime she was probably preferring to him

With torn and dusty cassock flayed hands and scratched face Francesco arrived after some hours of wild and aimless clambering up and down gorges through thickets of broom across rushing mountain waters at a part of Generoso where herd bells greeted his ear He was not in doubt for a moment as to the place he had thus reached He looked down upon abandoned Soana upon his church which was clearly to be seen in the bright sun and recognized the throng that was now streaming in vain toward the sanctuary Just at this moment he should have been donning his robes in the vestry But he could much more easily have cast a rope around the sun and drawn it from the sky than have rent the invisible fetters that were drawing him forcibly toward the alp

Something like a restoration of consciousness was just on the point of overtaking the young pastor when a fragrant smoke carried by the fresh mountain air

ascended into his nostrils Involuntarily looking about him with a searching glance he beheld not very far from him the seated figure of a man who seemed to be tending a little fire beside which was steaming a tin vessel probably filled with a *minestra*

The seated person did not see the priest for he had his back turned to him Hence the priest on his part could distinguish only a round almost white woolly head and a strong brown neck while shoulders and back were covered with a jacket that age weather and wind had made earth coloured and that hung loosely on him The peasant herder or woodcutter or what ever he might be sat bending over the little fire whose scarcely visible flames depressed by the mountain breeze sent out horizontal tongues of fire and flat gusts of smoke along the earth He was evidently absorbed in some task—a piece of carving as it soon turned out—and was silent like one whose immediate occupation has made him forget God and the world After Francesco had been standing a considerable while for some reason or other anxiously avoiding any movement the man or boy by the fire began to whistle softly and having once begun to make music suddenly breathed out into the air from a melodious throat detached fragments of some song

Francesco s heart beat violently It was not because he had climbed so furiously up and down the gorges but for reasons which derived partly from the strange ness of his situation partly from the peculiar impres sion which the proximity of the man by the fire pro- duced in him This brown neck this curly yellowish white hair the youthfully abundant physique which

one divined beneath the shabby covering the recognizably free and satisfied behaviour of the mountaineer—all this formed like a flash a connection in Francesco s soul in which his morbid and undirected jealousy flared up still more torturingly than before

Francesco walked up to the fire He could not have successfully hidden anyway and he was moreover attracted by irresistible forces At this the mountaineer turned around showed a face full of youth and strength the like of which the priest had never yet seen sprang up and gazed at the approaching stranger

It was now clear to Francesco that he had to do with a young herdsman as the carving he was executing was a sling He was watching the brown and black spotted cattle which visible here and there but on the whole remote and hidden were climbing about among boulders and brush betrayed only by the tinkle of the bells which the bull and some of the cows wore on their necks He was a Christain and what else should he have been among all the mountain chapels and the images of the Madonna in this region? But he also seemed to be a very particularly devoted son of the holy Church for recognizing at once the garb of the priest he kissed Francesco s hand with timid fervour and humility

In other respects however as the latter saw at once he bore no resemblance to the other children of the parish He was more powerfully and heavily built his muscles had something athletic about them and his eye seemed to have been taken from the blue lake far below and to be as far sighted as that of the brown ospreys which were circling as ever high about Sant Agata

His forehead was low his lips thick and moist, his glance and smile of a blunt frankness Secretiveness and hidden guilt such as are peculiar to many a man of the South were not to be detected in him Of all these matters Francesco took account eye to eye with the blond young Adam of Monte Generoso and confessed to himself that he had never seen such a naturally handsome lout in his life

In order to conceal the true reason for his coming and yet make his presence comprehensible he made up the lie that he had given the sacrament to a dying person in a r mote cabin and then had started home without his ministrants In doing so he had lost his way slipping and sliding and now wished to be put on the right path after he had rested a little The herder believed this lie With rude laughter and showing his healthy rows of teeth and yet with embarrassment he followed the priest s story and arranged a seat for him throwing the jacket from his shoulders and spreading it out on the roadside by the fire This bared his brown and shining shoulders and indeed his entire body to the waist and it was seen that he was wearing no shirt.

To begin a conversation with this child of nature involved considerable difficulties It seemed embarrassing to him to be alone with the man of the church Kneeling he blew into the fire awhile put twigs on it, now and then lifted the lid of the kettle and spoke a few words in an incomprehensible dialect then sud denly he uttered a mighty shout, which echoed and re-echoed from the rock bastions of Generoso

Scarcely had this echo died away when something was heard approaching with loud shrieking and laugh

ter It was various voices the voices of children among which was to be distinguished the voice of a woman alternately laughing and calling for help At the sound *of this voice Francesco felt his arms and feet go numb* and at the same time it seemed to him as if a power were making itself known which compared with the one that had produced his natural existence contained the true and veritable secret of life Francesco was flaming like the burning bush of the Lord but out wardly he gave no sign While his soul was insensible for many seconds he felt an unfamiliar deliverance and at the same time a captivity as sweet as it was hope less

In the meantime the laughter choked feminine cries for help had been nearing until at the turn of a precipi tous path a bucolic picture became visible as innocent *as it was certainly unusual The very same spotted goat* that had pestered the priest Francesco on his first visit to the mountain pasture was leading snorting and rebellious a little bacchantic procession and pursued by shouting children was bearing astride on his back the only bacchante of the troop The beautiful girl that Francesco thought he was beholding for the first time was holding in powerful grasp the twisted horns of the goat but strongly as she leaned backward drawing the neck of the animal with her she was unable either to force it to stand still or to slide off its back Some bit of fun which she might perhaps have undertaken to please the children had got the girl into this helpless situation *in which not really sitting but touching the ground* with her bare feet on either side of her unsuitable mount she was less carried than walking and yet could

not get free of the unruly fiery buck without falling Her hair had come down the straps of her coarse shirt had slipped from her shoulders so that one delicious sphere was visible and the short skirts of the shepherdess which never reached quite to her calf were now still less adequate to cover her voluptuous knees

It took some little time for the priest to become aware who the bacchante really was and that in her he had before him the hungrily sought object of his torturing longing The shrieks of the girl her laughter her involuntary wild movements her loosened and flying hair the open mouth the spasmodically heaving and panting breast the whole semi forced yet deliberate foolhardiness of the boisterous ride had outwardly changed her entirely A rosy glow overspread her face and mingled pleasure and fear with a bashfulness which found droll and pretty expression when one of her hands darted like a flash from the horn of her mount to the dangerously disarranged hem of her dress

Francesco was spell bound and captivated by the picture as if it were endowed with a paralyzing power It seemed to him beautiful in a way which did not suggest to him the remotest resemblance to a witch s ride On the other hand his impressions of the antique were revived He thought of the marble sarcophagus which stood on the village square of Soana ever overflowing with clear mountain water and whose sculpture he had lately studied Was it not as if that marble and yet so living world of the wreath-crowned wine-god the dancing satyrs the panther drawn triumphal chariot, the female flutists and bacchantes had hidden itself in *the stony wastes of Generoso* and as if suddenly one of

the god inspired women, cut off from the frenzied mountain worship of the mænads had surprised them by appearing in present day life?

If Francesco had not recognized Agata at once on the other hand the goat had immediately recognized the priest wherefore he dragged straight up to him his vainly shrieking and resisting burden and by setting his two cleft fore hooves without any ceremony in the priest s lap brought about the final release of his rider who slowly slid down off his back

The moment the girl realized that a stranger was present and actually recognized this stranger as Francesco her laughter and her gaiety came to a very sudden end and her face which till then had been beaming with pleasure took on a half-defiant pallor

Why did you not come to church today? Francesco asked this question rising to his feet in a tone and with an expression on his pale face which one must have interpreted as angry although it had for its cause a very different commotion in his soul Either because he wished to conceal this agitation, or out of embarrassment even helplessness or because the shepherd of souls in him was really bursting with indignation his anger increased and was displayed in a manner that made the herder look up in disapproval but that sent alternately the flush and pallor of consternation and shame into the face of the girl

But while Francesco was speaking and chiding with words—words that flowed easily from his lips without his soul s needing to be in them—all was calm within him and while the veins were swelling on his alabaster

brow he felt the rapture of a deliverance The utmost poverty of life which he had just been feeling was transformed into wealth his torturing hunger into satiety the accursed infernal world of a moment be fore was now dripping with the glory of paradise And while the ecstasy of his wrath was being poured out more and more powerfully that ecstasy grew and grew He had not forgotten the despairing state in which he had just been but his soul was jubilant now and he could not but bless it again and again For that state had been the bridge leading to happiness So far had Francesco already been drawn into the magic circle of love that the mere presence of the beloved object brought with it that enjoyment which benumbs one with happiness and which permits no thought of deprivation however imminent

With all this the young priest felt and no longer concealed from himself the extent of the change that had taken place in him The true state of his being had been revealed in the nude as it were The mad chase which he had just completed was not prescribed by the church as he well knew and was outside the hallowed network of roads that were clearly and strictly deline ated for his labours For the first time not only his foot but his soul had strayed into the pathless void and it seemed to him that he had reached the spot on which he now stood not so much as man but rather as a falling stone a falling drop a leaf driven by the gale

Every one of his angry words taught Francesco that he was no longer master of himself but on the contrary was being forced to seek and exercise power over Agata at any price He took possession of her with words

The more he humiliated her the more loudly resounded within him the harps of bliss Every pain which his censure inflicted on her aroused a delirium in him a little more—if only the herder had not been present—and Francesco would have lost in this delirium the last vestige of his self control and falling at the girl s feet would have betrayed the true beating of his heart

Agata had preserved to this day although she had grown up in that ill famed household the innocent mind of a flower Her blue eyes that resembled the mountain gentian had never been seen in the valley or down by the lake any more than the gentian itself The circle of her experience was limited in the extreme Yet although the priest was for her not really a man at all but rather a thing between God and man a kind of strange sorcerer yet she suddenly divined and manifested it by an astonished look what Francesco wished to conceal

The children had led the billy goat up over the rubble and away The woodcutter had not felt comfortable in the presence of the priest He took his pot from the fire and climbed with it very laboriously up to a comrade supposedly who was lowering bundles of brushwood with an interminable wire over a precipice into the depths below At intervals one of these dark bundles would crawl with a scraping sound along the rocky bastions looking not unlike a brown bear or the shadow of a giant bird Moreover it seemed to be flying since the wire was not visible When the herdsman had disappeared from sight with a yodel of such great power that it re echoed from the battlements and bastions of Monte Generoso Agata as if crushed with

penitence kissed the hem of the priest s garment and then his hand

Francesco had mechanically made the sign of the cross over the girl s head so that his fingers had touched her hair But now a convulsive trembling went through his arm as if a Something were trying with its utmost strength to keep another Something in its power But the straining resisting Something was yet unable to prevent the blessing hand from slowly spreading out bringing its palm nearer and nearer to the head of the penitent sinner and suddenly resting firmly and fully upon it

Francesco cast a cowardly glance about him He was far from wishing to lie to himself at this stage of affairs or to use the duties of his holy office to justify the situation in which he was yet there flowed from him all sorts of words about confession and confirmation And his very nearly uncontrolled straining passion feared so greatly the possibility of arousing horror and detestation in case of discovery that it too once more took cowardly refuge behind the mask of the ministry

You will come down to my school in Soana Agata said he There you will learn to read and write I will teach you a morning and an evening prayer also God s commandments and how you can recognize and avoid the seven cardinal sins Then you will confess to me every week

But Francesco who had torn himself free after these words and had gone down the mountain without looking around resolved the next morning after a painfully wakeful night to go to confession himself When he revealed not without disingenuousness his

qualms of conscience to a snuff taking arch priest of the neighbouring mountain town Arogno by name he was most readily absolved It was obvious that the devil was opposing the attempt of the young priest to lead straying souls back into the bosom of the Church especially since for a man woman was always the most immediate occasion for sinning After Francesco had breakfasted with the *arci-prete* in the parsonage and after many a frank word had been uttered concerning the frequent conflict between secular and churchly interests while the open window let in soft airs sun light and birdsongs Francesco yielded to the delusion that he was carrying away an unburdened heart

A part of this metamorphosis was due no doubt to some glasses of that heavy dark violet wine which the peasants of Arogno pressed from their grapes and of which the priest had a few hogsheads full Down into the vaulted cellar under huge tender leaved chestnut trees where these riches were stored on cross beams the priest at the completion of their meal escorted his fellow priest and confessant It was his habit to take down his flask at this time and fill it against the needs of the day

But scarcely had Francesco said farewell to his father confessor on the flowery wind swept meadow before the iron bound portal of the vaulted cave in the rock scarcely had he stridden vigorously away around a turn in the road and put sufficiently hilly country with tree and thicket between himself and the other when he began to feel an inexplicable repugnance to the consolation of his colleague and to the entire time that he had spent with him

This dirty peasant whose worn cassock and sweat filled underwear disseminated a repulsive odour whose scurvy head and rude hands covered with ingrained filth, proved that soap was an alien thing to him seemed to him rather an animal—or a clod—than a priest of God The clergy are consecrated persons he told himself so the Church teaches who have been endowed through the taking of vows with supernatural dignity and power so that even angels bow down before them This man could only be designated as a travesty on all such things What a disgrace to see the priestly supremacy placed in such clownish hands!—since even God is actually subject to such supremacy and is irresistibly forced by the words Hoc est enim meum corpus to descend upon the altar in the mass

Francesco hated him yes despised him Then again he felt deep regret At last it seemed to him as if the stinking ugly obscene Satan had chosen him for a disguise And he thought of those creatures that have come to birth with the aid of an incubus or a succubus

Francesco was himself astonished at these stirrings of his soul and at the course of his thoughts His host and confessor had hardly given any occasion for it, aside from his existence for his words even at table had been instinct throughout with the spirit of propriety But Francesco was already floating once more in such a state of sublimity felt himself to be breathing such a heavenly purity that to him compared with this hallowed element the commonplace seemed to be permanently bound by the chains of perdition.

The day had arrived on which Francesco was

expecting in his parsonage for the first time the sinner from the alp of Soana He had enjoined upon her to use the bell pull not far from the church by which one could call him to the confessional But it was already approaching midday and still the bell had not stirred while he becoming more and more absent minded was instructing in the school room some half grown boys and girls The waterfall sent its roar now swelling now diminishing in through the open window and the priest s excitement grew as the sound increased He was full of concern lest he should miss the tinkle of the bell The children were perplexed by his restlessness his absent mindedness Least of all did it escape the girls whose earthly as well as their heavenly senses feasted rapturously on the young saint that his mind was not on his business and hence not on them either Linked by a deep instinct with the stirrings of his youthful being they even shared in the suspense which dominated it at the moment

Shortly before the peal of the noon bell there arose a murmur of voices on the village square which till now had lain quietly in the sunlight its chestnut tops covered with the shoots of Maytime A crowd of people was approaching The sound of calmer seemingly protesting male voices was to be heard but an irresistible stream of women s words cries curses and protests all at once far outswelled them and drowned them to the point of inaudibility Then an ominous stillness ensued Suddenly there came to the ear of the priest dull sounds the cause of which was at first incomprehensible It was Maytime and yet it sounded as when in the fall a chestnut tree feeling the force of

a gust of wind shakes down tons of fruit at a time the hard chestnuts burst as they fall like drum beats on the ground

Francesco leaned out of the window

He saw with horror what was taking place on the piazza He was so frightened indeed so filled with consternation that he was brought to his senses only by the shrill ear piercing peal of the confessional bell which was being pulled with deperate persistence In an instant he had run into the church and out in front of the door and had snatched the confessant—it was Agata—away from the bell pull and into the church Then he stepped out before the portal

So much was clear the entrance of the outlawed girl into the village had been noticed and the people had done what they usually did at such times They had tried to drive her with stones as if she had been some wolf or mangy cur away from the haunts of men The children and mothers of children had assembled and chased the ostracized curse laden being without letting the beautiful girl figure disturb them at all in the assumption that their stone throws were aimed at a dangerous animal a monster that was spread ing pestilence and destruction At the same time Agata certain of the priest s protection had not let herself be swerved from her purpose Thus the resolute girl pursued and hunted had arrived before the door of the church which was even now struck by some stones thrown by childish hands

The priest had no need of chiding words to bring his excited parishioners to their senses they had scattered and fled as soon as they saw him

In the church Francesco had motioned to the pant ing silent fugitive to follow him into the parsonage He too was excited and so the two heard each other breathing fitfully Upon a narrow little staircase of the parsonage between whitewashed walls stood the hor rified but already somewhat reassured housekeeper ready to receive the hunted creature One could see that she was ready to help in any way that might be needed Only at sight of the old woman did Agata seem to become aware of the humiliating character of her present state Passing from laughter to anger and back from anger to laughter she uttered violent imprecations and thus gave the priest his first oppor tunity to hear her voice which seemed to him to ring out full sonorous and heroic She did not know why she was persecuted She regarded the little town of Soana much as she would have regarded a nest of mud wasps or an ant hill Furious and indignant as she was it did not enter her mind to reflect upon the cause of this dangerous malignance for after all she had been familiar with this condition from childhood and accepted it as natural But one fights off wasps and ants too Though it be animals that attack us we are brought by them to hatred fury despair as the case may be and unburden our hearts again as the case may be by threats tears or evidences of the deepest con tempt Agata did the same thing and while the house keeper was now twitching into place her miserable rags she herself was gathering up the astonishing pro fusion of her rust or ochre coloured hair which had come down during her swift run

At this moment young Francesco suffered as never

before under the strain of his passion The nearness of the woman who had ripened to maturity in the moun tain wilds like a delicious wild fruit the intoxicating glow which radiated from her heated body the cir cumstance that the confinement of his own dwelling now embraced the hitherto distant and unattainable girl—all this brought him to such a pass that he had to clench his fists tighten his muscles and set his teeth merely to remain upright in a condition that for seconds at a time completely darkened his brain When it lightened he became aware within him of a mon strous commotion of pictures thoughts and feelings landscapes people remotest recollections living moments in the past of his family and his profession united with images of the present Fleeing from these as it were an inescapable future rose up sweet and terrible to which he knew he was completely subject Thoughts quivered across this picture chaos of the soul innumerable restless but powerless The con scious will Francesco realized was dethroned in his soul and another was reigning which was not to be resisted With a shudder the young man confessed to himself that he had unconditionally surrendered to it This condition resembled an obsession But when there came over him a fear of his unavoidable plunge into the crime of a mortal sin then at the same time he would fain have bellowed in the most ungovernable joy His hungry glance looked forth with a wholly novel astonished satisfaction And more in this case hunger was satisfaction satisfaction was hunger The blasphe mous thought shot through his mind that here alone was his imperishable divine food with which the

sacrament gives heavenly nourishment to faithful Christian souls His emotions were idolatrous He declared that his uncle in Ligornetto was a poor sculptor And why had he not rather been a painter? Perhaps he himself could still become a painter He thought of Bernardino Luini and his great painting in the old church of the monastery at nearby Lugano and of the delicious blonde holy women that his brush had created there But of course they were nothing com pared with this hot, most living reality

Francesco did not know at first what to do An admonitory feeling prompted him to flee for the present the proximity of the girl All sorts of reasons not all equally pure moved him to seek out the Sindaco at once and acquaint him with the occurence before others could do so The Sindaco listened to him quietly —Francesco had fortunately found him at home—and accepted the priest s point of view in the matter It was but Christian and the part of a good Catholic not simply to overlook the deplorable conditions on the alp but to take an interest in the ill famed tribe ensnared in sin and shame But as to the villagers and their conduct, he promised to take stern measures against them

When the young priest had gone the pretty wife of the Sindaco who had a quiet silent way of observing things remarked

This young priest might easily get to be a cardinal yes even Pope It seems to me that he is wearing him self out with fasting prayers and night watches But the devil is always pursuing just the holiest ones with his hellish arts and with the most deceptive tricks and

wiles May the young man with Gods aid ever be preserved from them

Many desirous and many evil feminine eyes followed Francesco as he walked back to the parsonage at a pace as little accelerated as possible They knew where he had been and were resolved to use every effort to keep this pestilence of Soana from being forced upon them Erect girls walking along with loads of wood on their heads who had met him on the square near the marble sarcophagus had to be sure saluted him with submissive smiles but subsequently looked contemptuously at one another As in a fever Francesco strode along He heard the mingled warbling of the birds the swelling and diminishing roar of the eternal waterfall but it seemed to him as if his feet were not on the ground but were being dragged forward without a rudder into a maelstrom of sounds and images Suddenly he found himself in the sacristy of his church then in the nave before the high altar as he prayed to the Virgin Mary on his knees for help in the tempest of his soul

But his prayers were not meant to have the effect of freeing him from Agata Such a wish would have found no nourishment in his heart They were rather a plea for mercy The Mother of God should understand forgive perhaps approve Abruptly Francesco interrupted his prayer and tore himself away from the altar as the thought happened to flit into his consciousness that Agata might have gone away However he found the girl still there and Petronilla was keeping her company

I have settled everything said Francesco The road to the church and the priest is free to all Trust in me

today s happening will not be repeated There came upon him such a resoluteness and assurance that it was *as if he were once more standing on the right path and* on good ground Petronilla was sent to the neighbour ing parsonage with an important church document The errand could unfortunately not be postponed and incidentally the housekeeper was to inform the priest of this incident If you meet anybody the young man re marked with emphasis say that Agata from the high alp has come and is here with me in the parsonage and that she is being instructed by me in the doctrines of our religion our hallowed faith Just let them come and prevent it and draw down upon their heads the punishment of eternal damnation Just let them cause an uprising before the church to maltreat their fellow Christian The stones will not strike her but me I shall myself escort her as soon as it grows dark though it were up to the very alp itself

When the housekeeper had gone a long silence ensued The girl had laid her hands in her lap and was still sitting on the identical chair apparently rickety which Petronilla had moved for her up against the white washed wall There was still a quiver in Agata s eyes and the injury she had suffered was reflected in flashes of indignation and secret rage but her full cheeked Madonna like face had more and more taken on a help less expression until at last a silent copious stream bathed her cheeks Francesco meanwhile with his back to her had been looking out of the open window As he let his eyes rove over the gigantic mountain walls of the valley of Soana from the fate pregnant alp down

to the lake-shore while with the eternal murmur of the waterfall the singing of a single melting boyish voice came to him from the luxuriant vine clad terraces he could not but hesitate to think that he now really had in his hands the fulfilment of his all too human desires Would Agata still be present when he turned around? And if she were present what would happen when he turned? Must this turning not be decisive for his entire earthly existence yes and even beyond it? These questions and doubts led the priest to keep the position he had taken as long as possible in order to judge or at least consult himself once more before the decision was made It was a matter of seconds not of minutes yet in these seconds not only the entire history of his entanglement from the first visit of Luchino Scarabota onward but his entire conscious life became immediately present to him In these seconds a whole tremendous vision of the Last Judgment with Father Son and Holy Ghost in the sky spread out above the topmost ridge of Generoso and terrified him with the blare of trumpets One foot upon Generoso the other upon a summit across the lake the scale in his left hand the naked sword in his right the Archangel Michael stood terrible and threatening while the abominable Satan had descended with horns and claws behind the alp of Soana But almost everywhere that the glance of the priest strayed there stood wringing her hands a black robed black veiled woman who was no other than his despairing mother

Francesco shut his eyes and then pressed his two hands against his temples Then as he slowly turned around he looked for a long time with an expression of

horror at the tear bathed girl whose purple lips were quivering with pain Agata was startled His face was distorted as if the finger of death had touched it Speechless he staggered over to her And with a groan like that of one subdued by an inescapable power which was at the same time a wild life hungry moaning and groaning for mercy he collapsed upon his knees before her and wrung his clasped hands in her face

Francesco would perhaps not have succumbed to his passion in such a degree for a long time had not the villagers crime against Agata mingled with it a nameless burning humane compassion He realized what this creature endowed by God with the beauty of Aphrodite must without a protector look forward to in her future life and in the world He had been made her protector by the circumstances of the day had perhaps saved her from being stoned to death He had thereby gained a certain personal claim to her a thought which was not clear to him but yet influenced his actions operating unconsciously it cleared away all sorts of inhibitions timidity and fearfulness And in his spirit he saw no possibility of ever again withdrawing his hand from the outcast He would stand by her side even if the world and God stood on the other Such reflections such emotional currents unexpectedly united with the stream of passion so that the latter overflowed its banks

For the moment however his behaviour was not yet a betrayal of the right the consequence of a resolve to sin it was only a state of weakness of helplessness Why he did what he was doing he could not have told

In truth he was really doing nothing only something was happening to him And Agata who really should have been frightened now was not frightened but seemed to have forgotten that Francesco was a stranger to her and a priest He seemed all at once to have be come her brother And while her weeping increased to sobbing she not only permitted him now likewise shaken by dry sobs to embrace her as if to comfort her but she lowered her tear streaming face and hid it on his breast

Now she had become a child and he her father by virtue of his seeking to comfort her in her sorrow But he had never felt the body of a woman so close to him and his caresses and his tenderness were soon more than fatherly To be sure he felt clearly that in the sobbing woe of the girl there was something like a confession He realized that she knew to what a hateful love she owed her existence and was weeping over it with him in equal sorrow Her distress her pain he was bearing with her Thus their souls were united But he soon lifted her sweet Madonna face to his own clasping her around the neck and drawing her to him while his right hand bent back her white brow and when he had long feasted greedy looks on what he thus held imprisoned with the fire of madness in his eye he suddenly dropped like a hawk upon her hot tear salted mouth and remained indissolubly fused with it After moments of earthly reckoning eternities of paralyzing bliss Francesco suddenly tore himself away and stood firmly on both feet with the taste of blood on his lips

Come said he you cannot go home alone without protection and so I shall accompany you

A changeable sky hung over the Alpine world as Francesco and Agata stole out of the parsonage They turned into a field path on which they climbed down unseen from terrace to terrace between mulberry trees and through garlands of grape vines Francesco knew very well what lay behind him and what Rubicon he had now crossed but he could feel no regret He was altered sublimated liberated The night was sultry In the plain of Lombardy it seemed thunder-storms were moving about whose distant flashes shot up in fan shaped rays behind the giant silhouettes of the mountains Odours of the immense lilac tree under the windows of the parsonage floated down from thence with the passing seeping water of the branching brooks mingled with warm and cold currents of air The two intoxicated beings did not speak He supported her as often as they climbed down the wall in the darkness to a lower terrace and would perhaps catch her in his arms so that her heart beat on his his thirsty mouth clung to hers They did not really know where they were going for from the depths of Savaglia s gorge no path led up the alp They were agreed on this however that they must avoid the ascent to it through the village But it was not their intention to reach any external, any distant goal but to enjoy to the full their immediate attainment.

How full of dross how dead and empty the world had been hitherto and what a transformation it had undergone How she had changed in the priest s eyes and how he had changed in hers Effaced and of no account were all the things in his recollection that hitherto had meant everything to him Father mother

as well as his teachers had all been left behind like vermin in the dust of the old rejected world whereas to him the son of God the new Adam the cherub had reopened the gates of paradise In this paradise in which he was now taking his first enraptured steps timelessness was supreme He no longer felt himself a man of any particular time or age Equally timeless was the nocturnal world about him And since the time of expulsion the world of banishment and of original sin now lay behind him outside the guarded gates of paradise he no longer felt the slightest fear of it Nobody out yonder could injure him It was not in the power of his superiors not in the power of the Pope himself even to prevent his enjoyment of the least of the fruits of paradise nor to take from him the least fragment of that gift of grace that highest bliss which had once for all been bestowed upon him His superiors had become inferiors They lived forgotten in a long lost world of wailing and gnashing of teeth Francesco was no longer Francesco he had just been awakened by the breath of God as first man as sole Adam sole master of the Garden of Eden There lived no other man besides him in the expanse of this sinless creation Constellations making heavenly music trembled with ecstasy Clouds lowed like greedily pasturing kine purple fruits radiated streams of sweet rapture and delicious refreshment tree trunks sweated fragrant resin blossoms strewed precious spices but all this depended upon Eve whom God had placed among all these miracles as the fruit of fruits the spice of spices upon her who was herself His greatest miracle All the fragrance of the spices their finest essence the Creator

had put into the hair skin and fruity flesh of her body but her form and substance had no equal Her form and substance was God s secret Her form moved of itself and was equally delicious at rest or in change Her substance seemed to be made from that out of which lily leaves and rose petals are formed but it was of chaster coolness and of hotter fire it was at once more delicate and more resistant In this fruit there was a living throbbing kernel delicious quivering pulses hammered in it and when one tasted of her she bestowed little by little all the more delicious exquisite raptures while her heavenly abundance lost nothing thereby

And the most delicious thing in this creation this regained paradise one could easily deduce from the nearness of the Creator God had neither finished His work here and left it alone nor had He laid Himself to rest in it On the contrary the creating hand the creating spirit were not withdrawn they remained creatively at work And every one of all the parts and members of paradise was creative Francesco Adam having only just issued from the potter s workshop felt himself creatively active in every direction With a rapture which was super worldly he felt and saw Eve the daughter of God There was still clinging to her the love that had formed her and the most delicious of all substances which the Father had utilized for her body still had that unearthly beauty which was not sullied by the smallest grain of earthly dust But this creation too was still quivering swelling and shining with the heavenly fire of active creative power and burning to be fused with Adam And Adam again was

burning to unite with her and enter into a new perfec tion.

Agata and Francesco Francesco and Agata the priest, the son of a good family and the outlawed despised shepherd maid—they were the first human couple as they clambered hand in hand by nocturnal byways down the mountain They were seeking the deepest seclusion Silent their souls filled with a name less astonishment with a rapture that swelled both their breasts almost to bursting they descended deeper and deeper into the delicious miracle of the cosmic hour

They were moved The blessing the holy election which they felt resting upon them mingled with their infinite happiness a serious solemnity They had felt their bodies had been united in a kiss but they felt the unknown destiny to which they were going It was the ultimate mystery It was the very reason why God was creating and why he had put death into the world taking death into the bargain as it were

So the first human couple arrived at the bottom of the narrow gorge which the little Savaglia had worn It was very deep and only a faint unfrequented foot path led along the brink of the water course up to the reservoir into which the mountain water plunged down from a dizzy height over a rock ledge At a consider able distance from this point the brook was divided into two branches which soon reunited by a small green islet which Francesco loved and had often visited because it was made very lovely by some young apple trees that had taken root there And Adam took off his shoes and carried his Eve over to it Come or I die he said more than once to Agata And they trampled

down narcissus and Easter lilies with the heavy almost drunken tread of lovers

Even here in the gorge there was summer heat though the rushing flow of the brook brought coolness with it How short was the time that had elapsed since the turning point in the life of the couple and how far away everything had receded that lay before that turning point Since the islet was rather remote from the village, the peasant who owned it in order to be somewhat protected against the contingencies of the weather had constructed of stones branches and earth a hut which afforded a tolerably rain proof couch of leaves It was perhaps this hut that had been in his mind s eye when Adam took with Eve the down hill instead of the up hill path The hut seemed prepared to receive the lovers Secret hands here seemed to have been advised of the approaching festival of the secret incarnation for there were clouds of light about the hut clouds of sparks fireflies glow worms worlds milky ways which sometimes ascended in mighty sheaves as if they were going to re people empty universes They swarmed and floated at such a height through the gorge that one could no longer distinguish from them the stars of heaven

Although they were familiar with it this spectacle this silent magic was none the less wonderful for Fran cesco and the sinful Agata and their wonder at it checked them for a moment Is this the spot thought Francesco which I have so often visited and surveyed with satisfaction really without any presentiment of what it would one day mean to me? It seemed to me a place whither one might withdraw as a hermit from the

woe of the world and renouncing all immerse oneself in the word of God What it really is an island in the river Euphrates or Tigris the secret blissfullest spot in paradise I should not have seen in it And the mystic flaring spark clouds nuptial fires sacrificial fires or whatever they might be lifted him completely from the earth When he did not forget the world he knew that it was lying powerless before the gates of the garden of Eden like the seven headed dragon the seven headed beast that came up out of the sea What had he to do with them that worshipped the dragon? Let it blaspheme against the hut of God Its slavering would not reach their retreat Never had Francesco never had he as priest felt such a nearness to God such a security in Him such an obliviousness of his own personality and gradually in the rushing of the mountain brook the mountains seemed to boom melodiously the rock crags to peal like an organ the stars to make music with myriads of golden harps Choirs of angels shouted through infinite space like tempests the harmonies came roaring down from above and bells bells chimes of bells wedding bells small and large deep and high immense and delicate diffused an oppressive blissful solemnity throughout the universe And so they sank locked in each other s embrace upon their leafy bed

There is no moment that tarries and even though one tries with anxious haste to hold fast those of the highest rapture—try as one will one finds no handle to hold them by His whole life Francesco felt consisted of steps up to the summit of the mystery he was now living Where should one breathe in future if one

could not hold it fast? How should one endure an existence like the damned if one were once more expelled from the ecstasies of this innermost heaven? In the midst of the superhuman intoxication of enjoyment the young man felt with shooting pain the transitoriness of it in the enjoyment of possession the torment of loss It seemed to him as if he were drinking a cup of delicious wine and quenching an equally delicious thirst but the cup was never emptied and yet the thirst was never quenched Nor did the drinker wish his delicious thirst to be satiated nor his cup to be emptied yet he sucked at it with greedy frenzy tormented because he could never get to the bottom

Embraced by the rushing of the brook overflooded by it encircled by dancing fireflies the couple rested on the rustling leaves while the stars twinkled in through the roof of the hut Of all Agata s mysteries which he had marvelled at like unattainable treasures he had taken trembling possession He had plunged into her loosened hair his lips clung to her lips But immediately his eye was filled with envy of his mouth which had robbed it of the sight of the sweet girl mouth And ever more incomprehensible glowing and benumbing welled up bliss from the mysteries of her young body What he had never hoped to possess when hot nights would tantalize him with it was nothing compared to what he now possessed without stint or limit

And while he was feasting he would ever and again b come incredulous The excess of his consummation always tempted him afresh to assure himself insatiably of his ownership For the first time in his life his fingers

his trembling hands and palms his arms his breast his lips touched a woman And she was to him more than woman He felt as if he had recovered something that had been lost or flung away without which he had been a cripple and with which he had now united to form a perfect whole Had he ever been separated from these lips this hair these breasts and arms? It was a goddess not a woman And besides it was nothing that existed by itself he burrowed into the heart of the world and with his ears pressed against her virgin breasts he listened with blissful shudders to the heart beat of the world

That stupor that half sleep came over the couple in which the raptures of exhaustion turn into the delights of conscious feeling and the delights of conscious feel ing into the raptures of the stupor of oblivion so that now Francesco went to sleep in the arms of the girl now Agata went to sleep in his How strangely and confidingly had the shy wild girl submitted to the caressing compulsion of the priest how devotedly and happily she obeyed him And when she went to sleep in his arms it was with the contented smile with which the satiated nursling s eye closes in the arms and on the breast of its mother But Francesco surveyed the slumberer with astonishment and love Through her body went waves of twitches such as the relaxation of life brings with it Sometimes the girl cried out in sleep But always it was the same infatuating smile when she opened her languishing lids and then the same dying in ultimate abandonment As often as the youth dozed off it seemed to him as if some power were gently gently wresting from him the body which

he held in his embrace and which he touched every where with his own But every time there followed upon this brief wresting sensation as he awoke first a feeling of the intensest most gratefully realized sweetness an unnamable dream with a blissful conscious sensation of the sweetest reality

This was it the fruit of paradise from the tree that stood in the middle of the garden He held it in the embrace of his entire body It was fruit from the tree of life not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with which the snake had tempted Eve No it was that fruit the enjoyment of which made one equal with God In Francesco any desire for a higher or other bliss had died out Not on earth and not in heaven were there rapture that were comparable with his There was no king no God whom the young man rioting in excess of feasting would not have felt to be a starving beggar His speech had degenerated to a stammer to a jerky panting He sucked in the infatuating breath which streamed out between Agata s open lips He kissed away the tears of ecstasy hot on the lashes hot on the cheeks of the girl With closed eyes only blinking infrequently each found in the other his own joy with eyes directed inward with ardent and clair voyant emotion But all this was more than enjoyment it was something which human speech is inadequate to express

Francesco celebrated early mass punctually the next morning His absence had been noted by nobody his return not even by Petronilla The precipitation with which he had hastily to cleanse himself join the waiting

ministrants in the sacristy and betake himself to the altar before the expectant little congregation prevented him from coming to his senses This took place when he was once more in the parsonage once more in his little room where the housekeeper set the customary breakfast before him But this recovery did not at once bring the clearness of sobriety Rather did the old environment the rising day give to his past experience the appearance of something unreal which faded like a dream of yesterday But here was reality after all And although it outdid in fantastic incredibility any dream that Francesco had ever dreamed yet he could not disavow it He had fallen fearfully there could be no quibbling about that the question was whether any recovery at all from this plunge this fall into sin was still possible The plunge was so deep and from such a height that the priest could not but despair of it Not only from an ecclesiastical but also from a worldly point of view this terrible fall was unexampled Francesco thought of the Sindaco and how he had talked with him touching the possibility of saving the outcasts of the alp Only now in secret and in his deep humiliation did he recognize the whole priestly arrogance the whole overweening conceit that had puffed him up at that time He gritted his teeth for shame he writhed with degradation as it were like a vain, unmasked deceiver in naked helplessness Had he not just been a saint? Had not the women and virgins of Soana looked up to him almost with idolatry?

And had he not succeeded in lifting the religious spirit of the village to such an extent that attendance upon mass and at church was actually becoming

habitual with the men once more? Now he had become a traitor to God a deceiver and betrayer of his parish a betrayer *of the Church* a betrayer *of his family* honour a betrayer of himself yes even a betrayer of the despised outcast ill famed and miserable Scarabotas whom he had ensnared more than ever in perdition under the pretext of saving their souls?

Francesco thought of his mother She was a proud almost masculine woman who had shielded and led him as a child with firm hand and whose unbending will had also prescribed the course of his future life He knew that her severity towards him was nothing but *flaming mother love* and that *the least cloud on* the honour of her son could not but wound her pride to the utmost that a serious dereliction on his part must inflict an incurable injury on the very heart of her life Strange that in connection with her the actual events that had been *recently* and *clearly experienced could* not even be conceived Francesco had fallen into the most revolting slime into the uttermost obscenity of depravity He had abandoned there his vows as priest *his essence both as a Christian and the son of his* mother yes even as a human being The werewolf that stinking demoniacal beast would have been all that was left in the opinion of his mother in the opinion of all men whatsoever in so far as they had any knowledge *of the crime*

The young man started up from the chair and the breviary on the table in which he had pretended to be absorbed It had seemed to him as if a hail of stones were rattling against the house not in the manner of *the previous day when they were trying to stone*

Agata but with a hundredfold thousandfold strength as if the parsonage were to be razed or at least turned into a rubbish heap and he buried under it as a flattened corpse of a poisoned toad He had heard strange sounds terrible shrieks frantic shouts and knew that among the frenzied ones who were unweariedly throwing stones were not only all the people of Soana the Sindaco and his wife but also Scarabota and his family and in the very foreground his own mother

After a few hours very different fantasies and very different emotions had already displaced the previous ones Everything that had been born of his heart searching his horror at the deed his contrition now seemed never to have existed A wholly unfamiliar distress a burning thirst was drying him up His spirit groaned as one who rolls with parched throat on the burning desert sand crying for water The air seemed to be without those substances which one requires for breathing The parsonage became a cage to the priest between whose walls he strode with aching knees as restless as a beast of prey resolved if he were not freed rather than continue in such an existence to rush against the wall and shatter his skull against it How is it possible to live as a dead man? he asked himself as he observed the villagers through the window How are they willing or able to breathe? How do they endure their miserable existence since they do not know what I have enjoyed and am now deprived of? And Francesco grew within himself He looked down upon popes emperors princes bishops in short upon all men as men look down upon ants Even in his thirst,

his misery his deprivation he did so To be sure he was no longer master of his life A supreme enchantment had made of him a completely volitionless and without Agata completely lifeless victim of Eros of the god who is older and mightier than Zeus and the other gods He had read in the writings of the ancients about this sorcery and this god and had despised both with a smile Now he saw clearly that one is actually driven to think of an arrow shot and a deep wound with which in the opinion of the ancients the god poisoned the blood of his victims This wound burned bored flamed rankled and gnawed within him He felt terrible piercing pains — till at nightfall, inwardly almost screaming with happiness he set out for that same little island universe which had united him yesterday with his beloved and where he had agreed upon a new meeting with her

The mountain herdsman Ludovico known to the inhabitants of the district as the heretic of Soana fell into silence when he had come to the place where his manuscript broke off The visitor would have liked to hear the end of the narrative but when he was frank enough to express this desire his host informed him that the manuscript went no further He was of the opinion that the story might well end here indeed must do so The visitor agreed with him

What became of Agata and Francesco of Francesco and Agata? Did the story remain a secret or was it discovered? Did the lovers find lasting or temporary pleasure in each other? Did Francesco s mother learn of the affair? And finally the listener wished to know

whether a real incident formed the basis of the story or whether it was an out and-out fiction

I have already said replied Ludovico paling slightly that a real incident set me to scribbling Thereupon he was silent for a long time About six years ago he continued, a priest was driven with sticks and stones—literally—from the altar and the church At any rate I was so informed by so many people when I returned from Argentina to Europe and came to this region, that I have no doubt of the occurrence itself Moreover the incestuous Scarabotas, though not under that name lived here on Monte Generoso The name Agata is invented I simply took it from the little chapel of Sant Agata over which you see the brown ospreys are still circling But the Scarabotas among other children of sin did really have a grown daughter and the priest was accused of illicit intercourse with her They say he did not disavow the fact, nor evince the slightest remorse and they insist that the Pope excommunicated him for it. The Scarabotas had to leave the region They are said—the parents not the children—to have died of yellow fever in Rio

The wine and the excitement which had been produced in the listener by the place the hour and the company and especially by the reading of the composition combined with all sorts of mystic circumstances made him still more importunate He asked again as to the fate of Francesco and Agata In regard to this the herder could make no statement. They are merely said to have been for a long time the scandal of the district, in that they desecrated and profaned the solitary shrines that are scattered about everywhere

and misused them as asylums for their infamous lust At these words the recluse burst out into loud wholly unaccountable and unrestrained laughter

Thoughtful and strangely moved the transmitter of this traveller s adventure set out for home His diary contains descriptions of this descent which however he will not insert here The so called blue hour that comes when the sun has sunk below the horizon was at any rate especially beautiful on that day One heard the roar of the waterfall of Soana Just so had Francesco and Agata heard it roar Or were they perhaps still hearing its sound even at this very moment? Did not Scarabota s stone pile lie over yonder? Did one not hear the voices of merry children mingled with the bleating of goats and sheep coming thence? The wanderer s hand passed over his face as if trying to strip off a confusing veil had the little narrative which he had heard really grown like some tiny gentian on a meadow of this mountain world or had this glorious supremely gigantic mountain profile this petrified battle of giants issued from the frame of the little story? This and similar things he was thinking when his ear was touched by the sonorous voice of a singing woman It was said he remembered that the recluse was married The voice carried as in some spacious hall with fine acoustic properties when people hold their breath merely to listen Nature too held her breath The voice seemed to come out of the rock wall at times at least it seemed to stream out of the rock in wide swoops full of fiery sublimity and the most melt ing sweetness But it turned out that the singer was ascending from quite the opposite direction up the path

to Ludovico's square h r She was carrying a pottery vessel on her head held steadily by her raised left hand while she led her little daughter with her right hand This gave the full and yet slender figure that straight, delicious bearing which makes such a solemn even sublime impression At the sight a sort of conjecture flashed like an illumination through the soul of the observer

In all probability he had now been discovered for the song suddenly ceased He saw the climber approaching with the full blaze of the western sky falling upon her He heard the child—the mother answering with a calm deep voice Then he heard how the bare soles of the woman stepped with a slap on the rough hewn steps With such a burden one must step out firmly and confidently For the waiting man the moments before this meeting were of unexampled suspense and mystery The woman seemed to grow One saw the tucked up dress saw at every step a knee momentarily bared saw bare arms and shoulders stand out saw a round womanly and—despite proud self consciousness—lovely face surrounded in primitive fashion as if by red brown earth with an abundant growth of hair Was she not the man woman the human female the Syrian goddess the sinner who fell out with God in order to give herself wholly to man to her husband?

The returning wanderer had stepped aside and the shining vase bearer walked past him her burden allowing only a scarcely perceptible return of his salutation She turned both eyes toward him while her head continued to face straight forward And over her face as

she did so stole a proud self conscious realizing smile Then she again lowered her eyes to the path while at the same time a superhuman light seemed to sparkle through her lashes The observer was perhaps over heated by the warmth of the day the wine and every thing else that he had experienced but this is certain before this woman he felt himself grow quite quite small These full lips curled almost in scorn for all their infatuating sweetness knew that there was no contradicting them There was no protection no armour against the demands of that neck those shoulders and that breast blessed and stirred by the breath of life She climbed up out of the depths of the world and past the wondering scribe—and she climbs and climbs into eternity as the *one* into whose merciless hands heaven and hell have been delivered